

THE PRIDE OF TELLFAIR

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NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS
PUBLISHERS ✦ MCMIII

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Published February, 1903.

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I

DAVENPORT'S law-office, over Mainwaring's store, looked down into Main Street. The pressed-brick store-fronts, telephone and electric-light wires, and paving were fairly suggestive of a city. But Tellfair's true village character was betrayed from Davenport's rear windows, which gave glimpses, between clusters of elms and maples, of the rolling prairie of northern Illinois only a short half-mile away.

In the front room a young woman fingered a typewriter. She might have been playing a symphony, though, instead of grinding out stereotyped dunning letters, so light and graceful was her touch. Occasionally she paused in her work, lifted a scented bit of lace to her lips, and gazed out of the window with pensive blue eyes.

A woman would have pronounced her overdressed for the time and place. She wore a pale-blue, clinging stuff, encircled at her slender waist by a belt of abnormal width, which forced the swelling front of her shirt-waist to a height not at all contemplated by nature. Yet the result was eye-compelling, which was probably what she desired.

Her pale hair, streaked with lemon, lay in glossy coils squarely on top of her head; and hovering on

The Pride of Tellfair

this, like a great butterfly, was a bow of baby-blue ribbon. Her feet, amazing small, were shod with dainty patent-leather Oxfords. The whole effect was that of cleanliness and physical purity. She exhaled, in one's fancy, scented soaps, perfumes, and toilet-waters; and elsewhere than at a typewriter she would have passed for one of those exquisite, useless feminine creations who seem born only to nap and bathe.

A door marked "Private" led to a rear room. This door opened presently, and a young man in a checked suit appeared. His red hair was tumbled, as if combed with his fingers, and his brow contracted thoughtfully. He sauntered across to a window, with his hands in his pockets and the stump of a cigar in his mouth. Yet his lounging carriage could not hide his deep chest and square shoulders, and his sluggishness suggested power in repose rather than laziness.

His reddish-brown eyes flitted up and down the street—aimlessly, it seemed, but they missed nothing, and the brain behind summed up the results. There was Ted Magoffin, a farmer, on a load of hay. (Ted ought to be able to make a payment on his seeder, if he was selling his hay.) There was old Dr. Burney talking to Henry Simmons. (Mrs. Simmons was probably worse again.) There was Si Hoskins, another farmer, with a big package under his arm, slipping into a saloon and trying to look unconscious of the fact. (The package was enclosed in the red wrapping-paper of the Tellfair Clothing Company, and looked like a suit of clothes; he must have sold his colt that morning.) There were Alonzo Weeks, editor of the *Citizen*, and Major Harrow, in close conversation with the promoter of a proposed inter-urban electric railway for Tellfair. Davenport did not take the trouble to draw a conclusion from this. He knew that he would promptly receive any "inside" information

The Pride of Tellfair

about the route of the road and its effect on real-estate values, etc.

"There's your father, Bertha," he observed, briefly, without turning.

The young woman arose and stepped with a silken rustle to another window. On the opposite sidewalk, in front of the post-office, was a man in an invalid's chair. He partly propelled himself by means of a hand-rail on the wheels, but a tall, queenly blonde was also perfunctorily pushing from behind—a woman incredibly young to be the mother of Davenport's stenographer. Yet such she was.

"It's the first time he has been out this spring," said Bertha, and waved her handkerchief as her father looked up and smiled.

Mrs. Congreve also looked up and gave Davenport a girlish flutter of her hand. There was an alertness in the poise of her head, a suppleness of neck and waist, and a roving fulness of eye which suggested that she would overlook very few of her men acquaintances in her passage down the street, even while engaged in steering her paralytic husband's chair.

Davenport thoughtfully watched the strangely assorted couple out of sight, and then turned his shrewd eyes upon his stenographer, now seated at the typewriter again. He might have been comparing mother and daughter. If so, it was to the advantage of the latter, for as he checked off her threadlike brows, faultless nose, sensitive mouth, and baby chin, his face softened.

He strolled over behind her, after a little, to see what she was working on. A curious thing then happened. The nimble fingers began to halt and stumble; a faint rose-color overspread her cheek, and she dropped her long silky lashes over a pair of dilated eyes. It was just as if a powerful magnet

The Pride of Tellfair

were throwing some delicate machine out of adjustment.

Davenport, noting this, looked at her wonderingly from behind. His face was tender but half disapproving. He showed no surprise, and he might have seen the same thing before. Then he stepped out in front of her again and sat down.

"The Priestleys are coming back to Tellfair," said he, drawing a letter from his pocket.

Bertha glanced up with interest.

"It seems strange that they should come back after so many years," said she. "They never had any associates here."

"I suppose it's no stranger for them to come a second time than a first, so far as that goes," he answered, preoccupiedly, glancing through the letter again. "They want me to look their house over and report what repairs are needed. I'm afraid it needs more than it will get, for I sniff poverty in that letter."

"I sniff white rose," said Bertha, spreading her thin nostrils.

He held the tinted sheet to his nose a moment.

"Poverty and white rose often go together. But look at that handwriting," he added, less censoriously, handing the letter over. "There is character for you."

She glanced the sheet over with subtle feminine hostility—aroused, perhaps, by Davenport's compliment.

"It's signed by Josephine," said she, vaguely. "She must have been about seventeen when they left here. That was six years ago." Then, after a pause, she asked, hesitatingly, "Do you think that little, stubby handwriting shows character, Morris?"

"The strongest kind," said he, rising and lighting

The Pride of Tellfair

a fresh cigar. "Every letter sits as firmly on its bottom as a washtub. I'll be back with the horse in ten minutes," he went on. "You keep a lookout for me, and bring down the notarial seal when you come. We might stop at the Priestley house on our way to the country. You may never have another chance to see it."

He returned to the other room for the big brass key to the Priestley house. In the half-dozen years it had been in his possession he had used it only once or twice, and he had some difficulty in finding it now.

After he had gone, Bertha read Miss Priestley's letter through again. The short, sturdy, upright characters certainly expressed power; and though u's and n's and r's and s's were all nearly alike, the writing swept along with considerable grace as well. Bertha reproduced a few of the words in her own tall, girlish hand, for comparison. (Davenport was always talking about character.) The result was not flattering. Her letters, alongside Miss Priestley's, reminded her of a file of long-legged spiders weathering a stiff breeze, and she tore the scrap of paper up. Reading character from handwriting was a piece of charlatanry, anyhow, like palmistry, she reflected.

The house at which Morris Davenport and his stenographer stopped stood on the edge of the village. It was a big, brown, flat-roofed building, not so far from the street, but borrowing an air of monastic aloofness from the trees and shrubbery which half hid it. This effect was also heightened by the ten-foot iron fence which cut the grounds off from the outside world. The carved-oak front door might have defied a battering-ram. The windows were barred with heavy shutters, which the little barefoot boys who peered half fearsomely through the cagelike

The Pride of Tellfair

fence on summer afternoons could not remember ever having seen open.

The front of the house and one side were bordered with a deep porch, which each summer was hidden behind banks of climbing-rose, wild cucumber, and honeysuckle. In these the catbirds nested undisturbed, leaving the cool, dark recesses of the porch to the wrens and phœbes. The house occupied a corner, but spacious grounds fell away to the rear and one side, in which directions neighborly curiosity—quite strong in Tellfair—was balked by a brick wall which the tallest man could not hook his nose over by two feet.

In the front yard was a fountain, but the water-nymphs and swans had parched and cracked for many summers, and the weeds in the basin grew bolder and taller every year. In the back yard stood a cluster of fruit trees, but each season the apples and pears and peaches fell and rotted in the deep grass along the wall, for even the boys had an unwholesome fear of the place and seldom trespassed. It was currently reported among them that a strange animal—no one had ever seen more than its green eyes—had its den under the porch, that the well was full of snakes, and that robbers had a rendezvous in the mow of the barn.

Davenport turned the key in the reluctant lock, and the pair stepped into the great hall. It was cold and damp, though warm outside; their feet started doleful echoes; a fine gray dust lay everywhere, and Bertha gingerly gathered her skirts about her. Several heavy pieces of furniture, all antique, still occupied the rooms, and a few pictures still hung upon the walls—not cheap, abandoned daubs, but great canvases in massive frames which even a tyro would have recognized as costly. Davenport, though the

The Pride of Tellfair

family's legal agent, knew no more than anybody else in Tellfair why these had been left behind. The Priestleys had never wasted breath in useless explanations, at least to the villagers. One of these pictures, its cord eaten through probably by moths, had fallen to the floor.

"If any one had heard that picture fall, especially after dark," said Davenport, leaning it against the wall, "Tellfair would have had a haunted house."

Bertha shivered, only partly from the cold. The still, damp, abandoned place, together with a flood of childish recollections of the mysterious family, affected her strongly.

"How many of them died of yellow-fever in New Orleans, Morris?" she asked, in almost a whisper.

"I don't know—Mr. Priestley certainly, and I think Mrs. Priestley, and maybe one or two of the girls. They have never written anything about it to me. All I know is from what their lawyer down there dropped in one of his letters about the property here. They are a strangely reticent family. But that, is because we don't know them, perhaps," he added.

A nondescript instrument, on the order of a harpsichord, stood in a corner. Its age was sufficiently attested by its worn yellow keys and quaint character generally; but on a silver plate above the keyboard were the words, "Émile Drouet, Paris, 1765."

"That's an heirloom on the French side of the house—the mother's side," said Davenport, pausing before the instrument. "I happen to know that, because I had it insured about five years ago. The policy expired two years ago. I notified them, but never got any answer."

He bent over the aged keyboard and struck a double chord. The effect was startling. The instrument was horribly out of tune; the jangling notes echoed

The Pride of Tellfair

through the great high-ceiled rooms, ran up the broad, uncarpeted staircase like scurrying rats, and died away with ghostly sounds in the chambers above—chambers to which no money could have hired Bertha to ascend alone.

"Don't! Oh, don't, Morris!" she exclaimed, clutching his arm. "It seems almost sacrilegious, with so many of them dead."

In the next room—they were all connected by archways—Davenport paused and gazed curiously at what looked like a handful of colored wool in the middle of the floor.

"What is it?" asked Bertha, fearfully, from behind.

"Come here!" he exclaimed. "A rug evidently occupied this floor once—you can see how far it extended by a slight discoloration in the boards—and that wad of stuff there in the centre is all that the moths have left."

Bertha shrank back in dismay and lifted her skirts an inch higher.

"Morris, I am going to get out of this. I can't stand it. The place is ghostly, and I'll itch for a week."

"There are no moths here now; the winter fixed them," he answered, encouragingly, and led the way to the rear of the house. One of the doors which he opened at random showed a dark cellarway.

"I don't know whether we need go down there or not," said he, slyly.

"*We!*" cried Bertha, recoiling. "All the gold in the world wouldn't tempt me down into that horrible hole. And I don't want you to go, either," she added, with an indefinable change in her voice and touching his arm. "There might be ravenous rats or cats down there that would fly at your throat. I've heard of people being killed that way, and a rat's bite is poisonous."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Then I won't go," said he, gravely, and closed the door.

They examined the up-stairs, and Davenport even climbed into the attic, against Bertha's protest, to look for holes in the roof. She awaited uncomfortably below.

"That house is a finer monument to old man Shackleford," said Davenport, as they reached the pure, sweet air outside once more, "than the granite shaft his wife set up in the cemetery. He built it to stay, and it's staying. There isn't a hole in the roof, nor a floor or wall out of plumb, and outside it hasn't changed in appearance in six years."

Davenport had undertaken to educate Bertha along certain lines. He allowed her to draw simple legal instruments, to make formal appearances for him before justices of the peace, and to do other things which exercised her self-reliance. He did this merely for amusement, but it is true the thought had crossed his mind that what he sowed in the maid he might reap in the woman. He was thirty years old and prosperous, and his mind often turned wifeward. There was no other woman in Tellfair that he cared for, and he was not sure that he cared for Bertha.

He was also teaching her how to drive, and when they were again seated in the light runabout he handed her the lines, warning her that the colt had on his war-paint. It was a pleasing sight to watch her control the skittish young animal, her body bent forward, feet braced, hands extended, eyes darkling with excitement, and cheeks shot with crimson tongues. Her willingness to learn and anxiety to please were interesting, too. Yet she lacked a certain fire which Davenport would have liked to see.

As they passed some hogs, the colt shied and broke into a pitching gallop. A few weeks before such a

The Pride of Tellfair

thing would have filled Bertha with terror; but she was learning, and, without looking at her teacher, she set her teeth on her scarlet underlip and pulled bravely.

"Whoa, boy! Whoa, boy!" she called out, copying Davenport, except for the tremor in her voice.

"Not so loud!" cautioned Davenport, softly. "He thinks you are scared, too."

She *was* scared, but she lowered her voice. The colt, though, divining the true state of affairs at the other end of the lines, now began to run in good earnest. Bertha's nerve failed, and, giving up, she turned appealingly to Davenport. He relieved her of the reins, with a slight appearance of disapproval. A commanding word or two and a masterful but not powerful tension on the bit quickly brought the frightened colt to his senses. It was done so easily, so simply, that Bertha glanced at Davenport in chagrin. For a moment there was silence.

"You think I am awfully weak, don't you?" said she, ruefully.

"For being unable to hold this brute?" he asked, derisively.

"Not that especially. For other things, too."

"Isn't that rather indefinite?"

"You know what I mean. You are always talking about character, and telling me that every girl ought to know how to cook and sew, and ought to improve her mind by reading, and cultivate independence, and all that. I know well enough you are preaching at me."

Davenport glanced at her clouded face and laughed. He *had* been preaching, but very slyly, he thought; and he was amused that she should have found him out.

"I certainly have talked these things to you," he admitted, "but I did not mean to imply that you were deficient in them—that is, not especially so.

The Pride of Tellfair

I was merely giving you my idea of what a woman ought to be. Nobody is perfect, and perhaps I meant for you to take a hint or two. But that only shows that I am interested in you, that I think you worth helping—not that I believe you weak."

She glanced at him shyly. He had never received just such a look from her before, and it made him thoughtful during the rest of the ride. In a sense, he felt unworthy of it. It was just such a look, indeed, as he had hoped some day to receive from her; but, now that it had come, it somehow seemed premature. He did not know just what to do with it.

II

BERTHA slipped into her father's library that evening. She would have preferred, for certain reasons, to be alone; but catching Harvey Congreve out of his library was like catching a woodchuck out of its hole, and he now sat by his green-shaded lamp, reading. His wheeled chair stood near, to which he could transfer himself, if necessary, without help.

Neither Harvey's wife nor daughter read much, or placed any proper value upon his fine library, or upon the sacrifices he had made to get it. Mrs. Congreve was sure, though, that a great many dollars had gone for books, before Harvey's paralysis—which put an end to book-buying for him—that might better have gone for clothes. Possibly she was right.

As Bertha wandered vaguely from one case to another, her father, apparently absorbed in his book, watched her curiously. To see her skimming his titles gave him a pleasure akin, perhaps, to that which an old gardener feels when a humming-bird invades his fragrant kingdom and sips nectar from his flowers.

"What are you looking for, pet?" he asked, finally.

"Oh, just something to read," she answered, with forced carelessness.

"The fiction is over here, if you want that."

"I don't want a story. I want something, papa," she added, half-confidingly, "to improve my mind. I don't think I have been reading enough."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Possibly not," said he, hiding a smile. His faith in her mental improvement may not have been strong, with the warm summer nights just coming on. "There are biography, history, travel, philosophy, a dash of theology, science—anything you want. Have you any preference?"

She glanced at him to see that he was not making fun.

"Have you a life of Lincoln?" she asked, after a moment. Davenport had mentioned such a book once.

— Congreve had ten or twelve lives of Lincoln, but, without mentioning this fact, he directed her to a popular work in two small volumes of plain, readable type. Bertha took the books out into the sitting-room and cautiously opened one of them.

She was a graduate of the Tellfair High School, with a good record in history. It had been no trouble for her, before an examination, to stuff her head as full of dates and battles and kings as a sunflower is of seed; and there had been a time when she could name the Presidents of the United States, forward or backward, as rapidly as a good Lutheran repeats his catechism the day before confirmation.

But her historical facts, of course, meant nothing—had no continuity or organization. Now and then, in her scrappy reading, she came across a name which was vaguely familiar—the Missouri Compromise, Calhoun, Henry Clay, Nullification, Fugitive Slave Law. But in the fog of history they had no proper proportions or perspective, and touched shoulders with Patrick Henry, the Pilgrim Fathers, Battle of Lexington, General Braddock, and—Paul Revere's ride.

It is hardly an exaggeration, therefore, to say that an Australian Bushman, dropped into Broadway from the clouds, could hardly form hazier notions of the teeming

The Pride of Tellfair

life around him than Bertha held of the great moral and political movements preceding the Civil War, into which her biography now plunged her after a brief survey of Lincoln's rail-splitting days. But the girl had a streak of perseverance in her make-up, and she steadily turned page after page.

Her mother was cutting out a shirt-waist in the same room, moving about the table with the swift, springy step of a girl, whistling softly to herself, as happy and absorbed as a child with its first doll's dress. Time was when she hired her shirt-waists made; but Volley was not addicted to crying over spilled milk, and no thoughts of her prosperous past, before Harvey's paralysis, marred her serenity now.

"What does 'verisimilitude' mean, mamma?" asked Bertha, presently.

Volley broke off her whistle and critically eyed her pattern a moment before answering.

"You've got *me*, Bert. Ask Harvey. Do you remember whether those velvet straps on Mrs. Paddock's waist were straight or tapering?"

"Straight, I think," answered Bertha, closing her book and yielding for a moment to the seduction of dress-making.

"*Mine* are going to taper," said Volley, complacently. "Look!" Straightening herself and throwing out her splendid bosom, she held a strip of velvet against her front from waist to throat. "How's that?"

Bertha nodded her approval—she would have been more enthusiastic, but she was improving her mind—and then returned to her book. Volley, glad that Mrs. Paddock's straps were only straight, bent her tawny head over her work again.

Bertha, giving way to a rooted habit, began to dream over her book after a little. This self-improvement was not exactly a pleasing task; nor was

The Pride of Tellfair

this life of Lincoln the charming book Davenport's talk had made it out to be. Homely men had never interested her, anyhow. But the fault was with herself, she reflected severely, and she resolutely took another plunge into the political whirlpool of the later fifties. It was fifteen minutes before she came to the top again for breath.

"Did you ever see Lincoln, mamma?" she then asked.

Mrs. Congreve gave a merry little laugh—she was in prime spirits—and squinted along a chalk-line. The crouching posture brought out all her tigerish grace.

"A person might think I was Mother Eve from your talk, Bert," said she, sarcastically. "Why don't you ask me if I ever saw Julius Cæsar?"

Bertha made a mental calculation—she was quick at figures, if nothing else.

"You are thirty-nine, and you were five years old when Lincoln was assassinated," she answered, soberly.

Volley may or may not have known, before this, in which half of the century Lincoln flourished; she did not say.

"At the age of five," she answered, coolly, instead, "I was a tow-headed tot in a checked frock, on the farm; and the greatest celebrity that I had ever seen was a Holstein bull of ours that took first premium at the county fair."

A prize Holstein bull was not a celebrity which Bertha would have carried in her memory for a third of a century; or, if she had, she certainly would not have mentioned the fact—least of all now, in the first flush of self-improvement. She had an idea that refined people never spoke of bulls and such animals. She believed her mother refined, of course, but knew that she was decidedly unconventional.

"Did you ever see Ford's Theatre, in Washington, when you were a government clerk there?" she asked.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Many a time—a squatty little building that looked like a meeting-house. What book is that you're reading, anyhow?" asked Volley, her curiosity aroused.

"The life of Lincoln," answered Bertha, staidly.

"What's struck you?" asked Volley, frolicsomely.

Bertha resented the manner; perhaps she was unduly sensitive on the subject.

"I don't know that anything has *struck* me," she answered, stiffly.

But Volley's was an irrepressible nature—a frisky, coltish, teasing nature at times; and now her full, red lips drooped mockingly as she paused in her work to look at her daughter for the first time.

"Morris been preaching?" she asked, tauntingly.

Bertha flushed, but answered, severely, "If I were you, mamma, I would not speak that way about any one who had been as kind to us as Morris Davenport has."

"My innocent youngling!" exclaimed Volley, with a laugh. "I think as much of Morris Davenport as ever you dared, and I'd call him a preacher to his face. He preaches to everybody, and knows it. He has a little sermon for me every time I meet him. I sometimes feel as though I ought to pay him quarter-age, and tack D.D. on to his LL.D."

Bertha, mollified, smiled. It was quite true about Davenport's preaching, she reflected.

III

MRS. CONGREVE was destined to sit under one of Davenport's sermons the next day. When he came down to the office in the morning from the Basley House, where he kept bachelor quarters, he found one of his farm tenants awaiting him. The man had evidently been dabbling in strong waters, and Davenport, considering the early hour and the farmer's usual sobriety, suspected trouble. Sure enough, between maudlin whimpers the story came out, of a burned barn and out-buildings the night before, followed by tearful regrets, assurances of the most scrupulous care, and protests of undying loyalty to his landlord.

"Did you lose any stock?" asked Davenport, cutting off the last.

"Only one cow—thank God for that!" answered the farmer, fervently.

"Any machinery?"

"Not a machinery—thank God for that!"

"Don't thank God so much," said Davenport, dryly. "He'd probably prefer your thanks less strongly flavored with popskull whiskey. I haven't time to go out to the farm this morning, but I'll notify the insurance agent and have the loss adjusted as soon as possible. I'll go out this afternoon and look the ruins over. We'll rebuild just as soon as the insurance people get through. Meanwhile, you had better go home and go to bed. I sha'n't need you."

The Pride of Tellfair

After dinner he stepped over to Hayford's livery-stable for his horse. He also wanted to see Hayford himself. The latter held a mortgage on the Priestley homestead, the last year's interest on which had not been paid. With the return of the family this question of mortgage and interest would doubtless come up, and the lawyer wanted to know how Hayford felt.

He glanced through a sash-door into the boxlike enclosure labelled "Office." The walls were hung with harnesses and saddles, and decorated with lithographs and pictures from pink sporting-papers, representing full-length beauties, both equine and feminine, and pugilistic "stars." Mr. Hayford was not there, but the stable-boy—of thirty-five or so—thought he might be found at Congreve's, as he had just gone out to try his new sorrel mare.

Volley Congreve was passionately fond of horses, and Bradley Hayford, being at the same time a horse-man and a cousin of hers, gave her an opportunity to indulge this passion in a way. A more faithful cousin than Bradley, in fact, would have been hard to find, although he was not especially attentive to his aged parents; and the stable-boy may have had some of this in mind when he grinned.

Davenport ignored the grin and critically eyed the beautiful animal which the man was rapidly buckling into the thills. He was a horse-fancier himself, and usually kept half a dozen blooded specimens in Hayford's stable. Two or three minutes later he drew up before a pleasant cottage just beyond the railroad tracks, in the older part of the village. Hayford's vehicle was not in sight, so he had probably come and gone. To make sure, though, Davenport tied his horse and rang the bell.

"Come in, Morris!"

The sepulchral sound apparently came from the

The Pride of Tellfair

earth, and might have startled one who had not previously noted the speaking-tube above the bell-handle. It was Harvey Congreve's voice, and Davenport entered and made his way to the study with a readiness which showed perfect familiarity with the house. The study was a large, well-lighted room, filled with books and plants. The invalid had wheeled his chair into an embowered bay-window, and was just filling his pipe. The simple act well illustrated his weak condition; his thin hands would scarcely do his bidding, and spilled a good deal of the tobacco in his lap. He smiled brightly at Davenport, however, and extended his hand as far as he could. His face wore the patient, chastened air which one associates more readily with a woman than with a man.

"How did you know who it was?" asked Davenport, for Harvey's windows did not command a view of the street.

"By your wheels. You always stop a horse as though you had thrown him against a stone wall. Hayford declares you rack a horse in a month."

"That's all in Hayford's eye. I train my horses to make a quick stop, and they do it just as easily as if they took a quarter of a mile to it. Has he been here? I want to see him."

"He left here not five minutes ago—he and Volley. He took her out to her mother's. She hasn't been out there for some weeks."

The last had a tinge of extenuation or apology, and strengthened Davenport's belief that the invalid was not so blind to his wife's intimacy with her cousin as many people imagined. He answered carelessly, though:

"She couldn't have chosen a better day. The rain has laid the dust and hardened the roads. I'm going out towards Corning myself. The barn on my farm out there burned down last night."

The Pride of Tellfair

Congreve expressed his regret; they discussed the loss a moment, and then Davenport, who had not sat down, turned to go.

"Anything I can do for you, Harvey?"

"Well, yes. You might pump me a pail of fresh water, Morris, if you will, and bring me in some matches. She keeps them above the sink."

"I know where she keeps them."

Davenport, like most men, doubtless, preferred comfort to tidiness; and his office, before Bertha came, and his rooms at the Basley House yet, were chronically in a state which would have maddened a model house-keeper. But even his hardened eye was arrested by the scene of disorder which Volley's sitting-room presented as he passed through.

The floor was strewn with fashion-plates and scraps of dress-goods. On the table lay a hat and a pair of gloves. The beautiful Turkish cloth under them—a relic of the days when Harvey Congreve was a prosperous lawyer, with no thought of the horrid spectre which should come in the night and lay its withering hand upon him—was disfigured with a great circular stain of kerosene. A pair of woman's shoes huddled in a corner, just where the dainty feet had hurriedly kicked them off. Over a chair hung a pair of long, fiery-red stockings, undarned. In the parlor, where he also glanced, the afternoon sun was blazing through the window upon the polished surface of the piano. He stepped in and drew the curtain, and then went on through to the kitchen, to find the dinner dishes standing in the sink, unwashed.

"Harvey has the patience of a saint!" thought Davenport, hotly.

It was difficult to nurse even a just wrath against Volley for any length of time, she was such an irresponsible creature; but Davenport suspected that this

The Pride of Tellfair

neglect of home and husband had its roots in something graver than irresponsibility. The trouble, he feared, was a more than cousinly feeling of Volley's for Bradley Hayford.

He smiled pityingly at a crude, home-made framework of levers attached to the well-pump. It was a contrivance by means of which Harvey could get a fresh drink, on a pinch, in the absence of wife and daughter. It spoke eloquently of the invalid's lonely hours. So, also, did the speaking-tube at the front door.

Davenport's horse reeled off the eight miles to Corning township in just fifty minutes. He found a number of neighboring farmers strolling idly about the smoking foundations of the barn, with their hands in their pockets, speculating on the origin of the fire, and spitting tobacco-juice on the hot stones. Wilkinson, the tenant, had not gone to bed, as Davenport had suggested, but had evidently continued to suck comfort from his bottle. By this time he had reached a chronic state of tearfulness, and, blubbering and shaking his head despairingly, he poured a tale of woe about his lost cow into the ears of any one who would listen. The by-standers were either amused or disgusted, according to temperament; but when Davenport arrived they all dropped back a little, as people make way for the chief mourner at a funeral, and respectfully waited for him to speak.

"There's only one thing I really regret," said he, cheerfully, as he glanced over the blackened area—"for the buildings were fully insured, and I wanted to rebuild, anyhow—that's the burning of Wilkinson's cow."

"Oh, that poor, poor cow, Morris Davenport!" burst out Wilkinson, stimulated by his landlord's

The Pride of Tellfair

unexpected sympathy, and trying to fix his glassy eyes on Morris. "There's my wife a-settin' in that kitchen—that same summer kitchen right there before your eyes, Morris Davenport, that she cooked our dinner in yesterday—there she's a-settin' and a-cryin' her eyes out over that cow. That cow was the besh friend she ever had, Morris—Morris Davenport—the besh friend she ever had."

"I guess that's so, both before and after marriage," observed a sarcastic farmer.

"And now she's burned—burned to ashes," continued Wilkinson, tragically. "Morris Davenport, that cow—"

"Don't make a damned fool of yourself, Wilkinson," said a rough voice. "Go to bed and sober up."

"Morris Davenport, shall I go to bed and sober up? You know besh whether I ought to go to bed or not and sober up. You're my landlord, and the besh landlord any man ever had, if I do say it to your face. If you think I ought to go to bed and sober up, landlord—"

"By all means," said Davenport. "I told you that six hours ago. Take him in, somebody."

The weeping man was led off, none too gently, by one of his neighbors.

IV

AFTER taking some measurements, Davenport started home. He drove back at a more leisurely pace. His acquaintance among the farmers was something remarkable. He waved his hand at them in barnyard and field; he touched his hat to their wives and daughters. Passing a district school-house during recess, he was saluted with a chorus of shouts from the children and a nod and smile from the teacher.

He seemed to know every man he met on the road, and generally addressed him by his Christian name. Every other man he either stopped or was stopped by. Every ailing horse or cow in the country-side, as well as every ailing wife or child, was apparently the object of his solicitude. Had a man a prize colt or calf, hog or ram, a new drill or seeder, a new wife or a new baby; had he recently tried a patent fertilizer, or sold a tract of land, or disposed of his hay, or bought a horse, Davenport knew of it.

Nor did he discuss these things in the perfunctory manner of a man currying favor with possible clients. Brought up on a farm himself, his knowledge of rural affairs was accurate and solid; his advice was sought and respected. He had, moreover, the priceless gift of sympathy. He not only appeared interested in these people's affairs—he *was* interested. Add to this his professional knowledge and the advantages of six years at the University of Illinois, and one may understand why the farmers for ten miles around Tellfair

The Pride of Tellfair

regarded Davenport's office as headquarters when they came to town, where they could leave their wives and babies, if need be, while they sold their hogs—or got a drink. It also explains how Davenport usually knew, weeks or months before anybody else, when a farm would be thrown upon the market, or where the likeliest colts were to be had cheap. That he made good use of this favored information his prosperity attested.

Two miles south he turned in at his father's farm. The automatic gate, gravelled driveway, big, freshly painted house, flower-beds, and the spacious Venetian-red barns and out-buildings, all indicated an unusual prosperity for even that prosperous section of country. Roundabout lay five hundred acres of rich land, worth a hundred dollars an acre under the hammer. All this would some day descend to Morris, he being the only child.

A short, wiry, quiet man, with a red chin-whisker and blue eyes, leisurely appeared in the tool-house door at the splash of Davenport's wheels in the gravel. He stood with his hands in his pockets while Morris tied his horse, and finally advanced a few steps.

"Hello, father!" said the latter.

"Hello, boy!" answered the father.

He did not offer to shake hands, but, instead, looked his son's horse and wagon over with polite interest. Morris always had something new. In spite of his smallness, there was that about the senior Davenport which compelled respect. There was a game-cock sprightliness in his build and a subtle something in his mild eye which warned that he, while probably long-suffering, would be a bad man to rile.

After a brief exchange of words about the burned barn, Morris entered the house. He found his mother in the kitchen, baking, assisted by a girl. Her hair was gray, but rippled blithely from a low, square

The Pride of Tellfair

brow, and ended behind in a single short curl, which had the effect of being pinned on, like an ornament. In her laughing, brown eyes one saw Morris, with something feminine added. Her straight lips were also his, but they ended in a dimple which he could not claim.

She mischievously placed a floury hand on each of his cheeks and kissed him, tiptoeing a little. When she released him, he turned to a heap of crisp, golden-brown dough-nuts and took half of one at a bite, with boyish voracity.

— “Morris, we are so sorry about the barn,” said his mother, sympathetically.

She then questioned him closely about the insurance, the condition of the foundations, and his plans for the new buildings. He answered her minutely, and it was clear that she was a woman of business, in whose judgment he had faith. It was not difficult, either, to trace a connection between those clear, intelligent eyes of hers and the prosperity strewn all about, though it is not intimated that Henry Davenport was in any ill sense made by his wife, or chiefly known to fame as her husband. He had a decided individuality of his own.

“We could see the fire so plainly from here,” Mrs. Davenport continued. “I thought it must be either Drake’s or Shoemaker’s, and when your father came back and said it was your place, I could scarcely believe him. Fire is such a deceiving thing at night. It didn’t seem over a mile away at the farthest; and at first I thought it might be even Hemingway’s. I’m so glad, though, that no more stock was burned. How does Wilkinson feel about it?”

“He’s not feeling much of anything at present. He’s as drunk as an owl.”

“Your father thought he was tipsy when he drove

The Pride of Tellfair

by here. I guess that's the first time for him since he took the farm. He has done pretty well; the farm never looked better; and it's excusable, I suppose, so far as such a thing can be. He was up all night, and excited and worried."

After some further talk, her son turned towards the door.

"Aren't you going to stay for supper? We'll have fried chicken," she added, temptingly.

"My mouth waters. But how could I kill time for the next two hours?" he asked, teasingly.

"Yes, how could you, with nobody but your old father and mother to talk to?" she retorted. "There's the wood-pile, and I dare say you need exercise." But she glanced fondly at his sturdy frame. The maid snickered.

"I'd love to stay, mother, but I can't do it. I'm too busy. But I'll come out Sunday for dinner, sure." And with this promise he kissed her and left.

The Woodruff stock-farm lay a mile south of the senior Davenport's place. The house, unlike its neighbors, was set back nearly half a mile from the highway, on an eminence. At the foot of this eminence lay the track on which the young horses' mettle was tested and developed.

Seeing two drivers at work, Davenport whimsically turned in. Anything in the shape of fine horseflesh possessed an irresistible fascination for him. Reaching the enclosure, he drove in onto the track through a gate. The two horses he had seen were just coming down the stretch, their legs working with the precision of a perfect piece of machinery. Being headed directly towards him, they concealed their drivers at first; but, as they came closer, Davenport emitted a low whistle.

The driver of the pole-horse was humped over the

The Pride of Tellfair

animal's haunches like a great frog, the beak of his jockey-cap aiding the resemblance. The gentleman was Mr. Bradley Hayford. The other driver was a woman. Her round hat, stuck with a single rakish feather, rested lightly upon a thick mass of tawny hair. Her earlocks streamed away from a face flushed with excitement and eyes glistening like polished agate. Her whip played rhythmically but very lightly upon her horse's shoulder. This was Mrs. Volley Congreve.

The horses were coming at a tremendous pace, and Volley, in the heat of battle, paid no more attention to Davenport, drawn off to one side, than if he had been a crow perched on a fence-post. Hayford, however, was an older hand on the track and kept a cooler head.

"Time us!" he bawled, in stentorian tones, as they thundered by almost abreast. Davenport instantly drew his stop-watch.

As the horses circled steadily on their course, like twin planets in one orbit, Davenport stood up in his wagon to watch. Both animals were reaching out in splendid style, but Hayford's superior driving was beginning to tell, and he was slowly drawing ahead of his fair rival. At the three-quarter post, however, his mare broke; and though she instantly caught her feet, under her driver's skilled hand, it was not before Volley was alongside again.

It was now anybody's race, and Davenport sprang onto his seat so as not to miss a step. Both horses came down the stretch at a beautiful pace, eager as their drivers to win, with heads thrust straight out before them, like arrows from the bow, and their quivering nostrils distended until they showed blood-red within.

Hayford was again drawing ahead, when suddenly Mrs. Congreve lifted her whip high in the air. For

The Pride of Tellfair

an instant it quivered there threateningly; then it fell upon the horse's wet, taut hide with a crack like a pistol-shot. A novice would have seen no gain in speed, for the noble animal seemed already to be doing its utmost. But again and again the gloved hand lifted, the red lips set sternly, even cruelly, and the blows fell like a pitiless hail, until she shot past Davenport half a length ahead of the other horse.

Hayford was the first to stop and turn his horse and get back to the impromptu judge's stand. His round, heavy face, with its big eyes, was spread in a grin.

"What time?" he asked.

"One eight for the half," said Davenport.

"Better than two sixteen for the mile. That ain't bad for three-year-olds." He swung down—lightly, for so heavy a man—unchecked his panting, dripping horse, and threw a blanket over it. Then he turned to the lawyer with a chuckle.

"Say, did you ever see anything to beat that finish of Volley's? That hoss wouldn't have stood another ounce of pressure, and wouldn't have won with an ounce less. I've drove in more races, I suppose, than that colt there has hairs; but, I'll swear, I never saw the beat of that finish. You don't want the winner for five hundred, do you?"

Pushing his cap to the back of his round, closely cropped head, and resting his knuckles on his hips, he turned and gazed admiringly at the approaching horse, which Volley had had some difficulty in stopping. When it came up, he unchecked and blanketed it, as he had his own, and fondly patted its nose. Then, and not till then, he helped the fair driver to the ground.

"Finer than silk, Volley," said he, approvingly.

Her face was still flushed with pleasure and excitement. As she glanced at Davenport her eyes twinkled

The Pride of Tellfair

and the corners of her pretty but slightly sensual mouth dimpled. Yet it was quite apparent that Davenport had caught her in an act which she would have much preferred to keep from him.

"Now I'd like to try them other colts," said Hayford, briskly, "but I'm thinking, Volley, you'd better be gettin' back to town." He glanced at her, knowingly. "Morris will take you back, I guess."

She readily assented to this, and was helped into Davenport's runabout. He had said little, and as they spun noiselessly down the dirt road to the highway, Volley scanned his face curiously and a little uneasily.

"Been out to your mother's?" he asked, finally. The sarcastic tone did not escape her.

"I have," she answered, firmly.

"Find her well?"

"I did."

"Have a pleasant visit?"

"Morris, you needn't try to twit me. You are provoked because I stopped at Woodruff's with Bradley."

"It's nothing to me."

"You think I did wrong."

"You think so yourself."

"I do not. If I had, I shouldn't have done it. We went out to mother's, where Bradley was going to leave me for a couple of hours, while he exercised his horses. I found a bevy of old ladies at home. I knew I couldn't stand their twaddle for two hours, so I told Bradley to wait. After about twenty minutes I came out and went down with him to Woodruff's to see his horses. Almost before I knew it—I told him not to do it—he had two of them hooked into sulkies, and said I had to race. Morris, you couldn't have resisted it yourself, with that beautiful horse."

Very likely he could not, but he set himself sternly to his duty.

The Pride of Tellfair

"But you felt as if you ought to resist it."

"How you catch up one's words!" said she, complainingly.

"Because they are so easy to catch. Did it ever strike you, Volley, that you spend too much time away from home?" he asked, bluntly.

"You must be very sure of it, to speak so plainly," she answered, coldly.

"You leave Harvey alone too much," he continued, resolved to have it out, now that the gauntlet was down. "He has too much time to think about himself. A man in his condition is naturally sensitive, and Harvey was sensitive enough before his paralysis. If you are not careful, he will get it into his head that you are neglecting him, and then there will be trouble. The idea is already prowling around him, but he is fighting it off. You may smile, but I've seen it for some time. He loves you—I needn't say it—and he wouldn't do you an injustice, even in his thoughts, for the world. He shrinks, too, from the thought that he is no longer able to amuse you."

"It is I that am no longer able to amuse *him*," she answered, in defence. "He has changed so, even in the last year. You don't see it, because visitors always stimulate him—you especially; but when we are alone he does nothing but read and write and work on his drawings. What company is that for a woman? Sometimes I'm so lonesome, with Bert away all day, that I think my heart will break. Then, to be as poor as Job's turkey, besides, is too much."

"You have no right to complain of poverty, Volley," he answered. He handled Congreve's property—the little that was left—and knew to a cent what the family's income was. It was not much, he had to confess, but other families in Tellfair lived on less, and fairly well.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I haven't!" she exclaimed. "Well, that's good!" and she gave a short laugh. "How long do you think I have worn this skirt, Mr. Wiseman?"

He glanced at her snug figure, belted and buttoned beyond a wrinkle.

"It doesn't look very old."

"Well, how old?"

"Two years."

"I've had it *five* years, and four-fifths of the women in Tellfair know it."

"It looks better than the skirts of four-fifths of them," he observed.

"If it didn't I wouldn't wear it," she answered, proudly. "But I've pressed it and cleaned it and turned it until I'm so sick of it that I'd like to burn it up. But if I did, I'd have to stay in bed."

Davenport did not answer at once. A man of his income was not in a position to discourse on economy and the pleasures of poverty.

"There's another thing that I ought to tell you, Volley, as a friend," he continued. "Harvey is one of the most sensible men in the world, and the last man to suffer from baseless jealousy. He's too generous. Yet I believe, in my heart, that he is jealous of Bradley Hayford."

"My own cousin!" she cried, indignantly. "This is outrageous."

"No, it isn't. It's the truth, and I'm the man to tell it. Bradley is your cousin, but Harvey is your husband. I don't mean to insinuate that Bradley loves you, or that you love him, except as cousins. You needn't do that in order to wrong Harvey. When you give Bradley the time and attention that are due Harvey, you are giving due cause for jealousy."

"But Harvey wants me to go out riding with Bradley. He makes me go, for he knows how few pleasures I

The Pride of Tellfair

have. And he and Bradley are just as good friends as they ever were. Bradley comes to see him as often as you do—oftener—when I'm not there, too—and they talk together by the hour. Morris, you are wrong, wrong, *wrong!*"

"I hope I am, but I doubt it. You struck the key-note of the trouble when you said that Harvey knows how few pleasures you have. He fancies your home life doesn't satisfy you. He knows that you enjoy riding; and, as he wants you to have a good time, he tells you to go. It's all right to go occasionally, too; I'm no prude. But if you could just show Harvey that for a steady thing you prefer his company at home to Hayford's in a buggy, you'd work a wonderful change."

"If he doesn't know that now, I don't see how I could make it any plainer," said she, virtuously.

"By staying at home more."

"But when he insists on my going out, what can I do?"

"Cut out that twaddle, Volley," he returned, with some heat. "You know very well he isn't going to insist on your doing a thing you don't like to do. He tells you to go because he knows you want to go. Another reason why he tells you to go is because he hates jealousy, and he's struggling to convince himself that he isn't jealous. Jealousy is a proper enough thing at times, though."

"And this is one of the times, why don't you add?" said she, spitefully.

"Because I knew that you would add it for yourself," he answered, with a grim smile.

Little was said for the next mile. Volley affected to be interested in the passing landscape, and Davenport was willing to give his advice time to soak in. But at last her good-nature asserted itself, and she said, frankly:

The Pride of Tellfair

"A great many women would be terribly angry at you, Morris, for talking to them like this."

"I am glad that you are not," he answered, slyly.

"I'm not sure that I am not—yet. I think I should be if I had more self-respect." She eyed him steadily. "I am not happy; I am just reckless. My life is not what I once thought it would be. I am a disappointed woman."

"In what respect?"

"In every respect. I have no ambition, no goal. I just drift along from day to day. I'll never have any more children, and I don't want any more. Bertha takes care of herself. I am happy if I can get a new shirt-waist, and unhappy if I can't. There is no future before me. Anticipation was half of my life, and now that is gone. The way Harvey is, we shall never be better off financially, and we may be worse. We'll continue to live in the same house, with the same meagre income, and the same deadly round of drudgery, until—until a break comes. It's rather late in the day to speak of it, but I think I made my first great mistake when I married a country lawyer—begging your excellency's pardon!" she added, with a mock bow.

"You are making another mistake by confessing it."

"I kept it to myself a good while—for a woman," she answered, callously. "My Washington life spoiled me forever for this village vegetation."

"You are bitter now."

"Oh no, just truthful, as you are so fond of saying," she answered, with velvet cynicism. "But the mood won't last—don't fear. I'll go back again to acting the old, happy, domestic lie again in a jiffy, and nobody but you will ever know that I had my stage-clothes off. There!" she exclaimed under her breath, as she gayly waved her handkerchief to a group of

The Pride of Tellfair

ladies (they were now entering Tellfair). "I'm back already."

A woman may not love her husband; but if she has promised to love him, if the world thinks she loves him, and if he thinks so too, there will come moments when *she* also thinks so. As Mrs. Congreve stood at her door, a sudden, unexpected, rare tenderness for Harvey took possession of her; and as she laid her hand upon the knob she said to herself, "Shall I be honest and tell him that I went to the track with Bradley?" Her heart was actually thumping.

She entered the study with the question still unanswered. Harvey sat at a table with his back towards her, busy with compass, square, and pencil. Evidently he had exorcised his jealous demon, for he was in one of those states of extreme exaltation which alternated in him with extreme despondency. As he drew he whistled—not loudly, but with a tense, suppressed joyousness.

Volley knew that he was working on a sectional drawing of a marine engine—one of the many projects which occupied his busy brain. She came up softly behind him, though not stealthily, for he was easily startled, and laid her hands on his shoulders. He at once laid down his instruments and took the comely hands in his own.

"Well, dear, how did you find mother and Sammy and the chickens and the pigs?" he asked, gayly.

"All well, but grunting a little." And as he looked up she added, with a twinkle, "That is, the pigs."

Harvey never loved his wife more than just after one of these lambent flashes of humor, though she was capable of flashes which were not lambent; and he now lifted his hands laboriously to her neck.

"Kiss me!" he said, softly.

She obediently bent her head and laid her full, warm

The Pride of Tellfair

lips on his thin, cold ones; but her eyes turned slightly aside. Their gray surface was as unruffled as a sleeping pool, but they were not quite prepared to meet his dark, eager, happy glance.

She did not tell him. To chill that precious moment for him, even in the interest of truth, required more heroism than she possessed.

V

THE rumored return of the Priestleys to Tellfair ousted all other topics for at least a week in Feversham's drug-store, Hemingway's grocery, the post-office, and other local forums. Twelve years before the events of this narrative, the old Shackleford house, after a year's vacancy, was bought and occupied by a family who shut themselves up in their new home like a feudal lord in his castle. This setting at naught of all social precedents, traditions, and customs of Tellfair started such a conflagration of gossip as perhaps had never raged before in the village—and it had had some big ones.

The new-comers studiously refrained from feeding the flame with so much as one twig of news, but some facts were learned, of course. It was known, to begin with, that there were seven in the family. The father (he took an early morning walk each day) was a large, gray-haired man of military bearing, quiet and mild of manner, but with an eye that others than small boys found it difficult to meet. The mother, who was seen occasionally in her carriage, was tall, as dark as a daughter of Egypt, and as haughty as a queen. Four of her five daughters shared her dusky beauty, but the fifth and youngest—about ten at this time—was fair, like her father.

The family was rich, measured by Tellfair standards. They drove fine horses, and rode in odd, imported vehicles of a type hitherto unseen in Tellfair. They

The Pride of Tellfair

dressed elegantly, though quietly, and no early strawberries were too high-priced for their table.

These facts lay on the surface—were mere gold-dust, so to speak, to be had for the washing. What was wanted most were some nuggets of information, and naturally it was not long before some were unearthed. Lizzie McMaster, daughter and assistant of the postmaster, was authority for the statement that the girls' Christian names were Honoria, Helen, Clementine, Josephine, and Victoria. This formidable nomenclature impressed some people and amused others. But when the bearers became a little known, it impressed a vastly greater number than it amused, for the young women were as extraordinary as their names. They exhaled a perfume never before smelled in Tellfair; their clothes rustled in a manner that no village dressmaker could imitate; they wore the oddest kinds of rings, lockets, and brooches, duplicates of which could not be found even by those people who shopped in Chicago.

The family all spoke the purest English, so far as was known. Yet Hemingway's delivery boy heard a bevy of the girls on the porch one day break into a laugh over something they saw in the *Tellfair Citizen*, and then fall to chattering like magpies in a foreign tongue. When this bit of news was circulated, more than one copy of the *Citizen* for that week was hunted up and reread in the hope of discovering what had stirred the risibilities of the Priestley girls. Old Mrs. Donner, in fact, asked young Belcher, the delivery boy, what page the girls were looking at when they laughed, and what *part* of the page, as nearly as he could remember. But she discovered nothing, whereupon everybody else concluded that there was nothing to be discovered. The foreign tongue, however, was later pronounced to be French when it was learned (through Miss McMaster again) that the Priestleys

The Pride of Tellfair

wrote letters to people in New Orleans with French names, and also to people in France.

The first Sunday following the Priestleys' arrival it rained in sheets; but on the second Sunday, a beautiful day in May, the village certainly expected the family to appear at church. But which church? This was the question which exercised more than one mind. Regular attendants hoped it would be their church, and then dismissed the matter—after dressing with extra care. But the floating or independent worshippers had a harder time of it, and chose their church that morning only after some careful weighing of probabilities. The Priestleys fooled them all, however, and stayed at home. Nor did they ever, during their six years' residence in Tellfair, pass the threshold of any church.

Those ladies in Tellfair whose self-appointed office it was to keep alive the sacred flame on the social altar always made it a point to call, after a decent interval, upon new arrivals. But not one of them ever entered the iron gate of the Priestleys'; not because they were abashed—for Tellfair had its share of gentlewomen—but because the strangers had shown unmistakably that they wanted to be let alone.

If ever a family could stand being let alone, the Priestleys were certainly that family. Their home life—so much of it as could be seen through the iron fence—was ideal. Laughter, song, the strumming of guitars, the booming of the piano, floated through those dusty bars at all times. The family had the Southern love of out-door life, and until a late hour on summer nights the white gowns of the girls gleamed in the cool, cavernous depths of the great porch, with the glow of Mr. Priestley's cigar usually in the centre of the group. They played croquet and tennis outdoors, and billiards in-doors. They took long, all-day

The Pride of Tellfair

drives into the country, coming back laden with flowers in the spring and golden-rod and leaves in the fall.

During the year they had few or no visitors from out of town; but each Christmas they held a house-party for a fortnight. It was supposed by Tellfairians that the guests were from New Orleans, for they were mostly dark and foreign-looking; and when they were driven around the village they laughed and chattered and gesticulated in a way which sometimes amused, sometimes offended the more phlegmatic Northerners.

But however superficial these dark people may have seemed to native eyes, they had certainly learned the art of happiness. These two weeks were always one continuous carnival. Music and dancing and feasting filled the days and nights. There were no young children, but they never failed to have a Christmas-tree—it could be seen from the street—and everybody entered into the fun with the abandon of youngsters. More than one village couple would stroll past the house after nightfall, and look enviously through the iron barrier upon the light and warmth and good cheer beyond. And when the visitors had flown, like beautiful birds of passage, the town actually felt a sense of loss, although not even Alonzo Weeks, editor of the *Citizen*, ever learned the name of a single guest.

No family secrets leaked out the Priestleys' back door, that common source of leakage. The cook and three maids, which the family brought with them, spoke only French. Their coachman, though an Irishman, might have been hired for his reticence alone—and probably was—for he was almost as exclusive as his employer. But there was one member of the family retinue which Tellfair, strangely enough, came to know well. This was a little, dried-up, genial, active old man who was a sort of buffer between the family and the world. He bought all supplies for the house,

The Pride of Tellfair

paid all bills, carried the mail, and, in short, performed every function for the family which involved contact with the public.

As a consequence, his little, stooped figure and wizened face soon became a familiar sight on Main Street, where he was known simply as old Campeau. In spite of his physical insignificance and the ridiculous flat hat which he always wore, he quickly won the respect of everybody. Though doubtless of low birth, he had a simple dignity—borrowed, perhaps, from his master—which kept prying curiosity at arm's-length. His blue eye was as innocent as a woman's, and his voice as soft and low. He was tender and genial, but no one ever heard him spring a joke; and his face, when not animated by sympathy or interest, was rather sad.

It was this sadness of Campeau's, perhaps, which gave rise in part to the belief that the Priestleys had a "past." Their singular life could not fail of itself to color such a belief. Their iron fence, social isolation, and foreign-tongued servants stimulated speculation. The village began to suspect in time that beneath the surface of the Priestleys' peaceful life lay depths of unrest—that the brightness which they saw was but the reflection from a cloud. What the family's secret was—if it had any—the village was destined never to know; but they would not believe it very bad. At least, not many would. There were some, of course, who would not have been surprised, any day, to see the family arrested in a body and marched off to jail.

The world respects the man who shows his independence of it. In time, Tellfair actually became proud of her first family, and adopted them, in a way, in spite of themselves. She showed them to her visitors, and told their story—with variations. She pointed out their equipages on the street. She accepted checks from them

The Pride of Tellfair

—always through the mail—for public enterprises. She missed them when they closed the blinds of their big house, now and then, and slipped away for a fortnight—no one knew whither.

But just how much she missed them she never knew until one morning they closed their blinds and opened them no more. She could not quite believe they had gone for good until the horses and carriages and furniture were on the way to the freight-house; until old Campeau had turned the great brass key in the front door and trudged sadly towards the station, saying—good-bye to no one, but throwing a pathetic farewell into his quasi-military salute to those whom he chanced to pass. His gentle presence and plethoric purse were missed after that on Main Street. The neighbors missed the music and the bright morning gowns in the yard; and there were others who missed the carriage with its sweet, girlish faces and flowers or autumn leaves from the woods.

Then came the six years' sleep of the old house, when winter's snow lay banked upon the porch and summer's bees droned over the neglected flowers, and the barefoot boys peeped through the iron fence on scorching afternoons and dreamed, and the dust from the road powdered the tangled lawn, and the hollyhocks and sunflowers in the garden, like decaying old families, lifted themselves proudly above the horde of invading weeds.

Some months after the family's departure, Morris Davenport had received a letter from Mr. Priestley, in New Orleans, asking him to keep an eye on the property, but under no circumstances to rent it. He stated further that the taxes would be remitted by his attorney in New Orleans, and this had been done.

Three years passed; then came another letter from Mr. Priestley, asking Davenport to mortgage the house

The Pride of Tellfair

for all he could, *without delay*. Evidently the Priestleys' wheel of fortune had turned. Another long silence; then came the news, indirectly, that the Priestleys had sailed for France, and the stories about Mrs. Priestley's noble or even royal lineage were revived. But almost on the heels of this came the tragic and conflicting news that the Priestleys had all been swept away in New Orleans by the yellow-fever.

The old house looked more desolate than ever now, and some people preferred not to pass it after dark. As for the little barefoot boys who pressed their brown faces to the dusty bars of the fence, this fear of their elders only went to confirm what they had long believed about the strange animal under the porch, the snakes in the well, and the robbers in the barn.

But the Priestleys had not all died, and some of them were coming back. No wonder the town was stirred. But how many? Not even Davenport could tell.

Campeau came first, as anybody might have known he would. He arrived on an early train, and went directly to the house. Few were on the streets at that hour, and he spoke to no one. He was dressed in black. Though of an age and temperament with which time ordinarily makes a truce, he seemed to have grown twelve years older in the six. When he appeared at Simmons's store, though, later in the forenoon, it began to look more like old times; and old man Simmons sharpened his pencil for a good fat order. He nearly dropped when Campeau asked for some crackers and cheese and nothing more.

"Glad to see you back, Campeau," the grocer managed to say, however, certain that when the family came this absurd frugality would be cut short.

"I thank you, sir," answered the old man, with his fine dignity.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Family comin' back to Tellfair again?" asked Simmons, as he lifted his cheese-knife. Campeau had said that he would take the groceries with him—another unprecedented thing.

"What there is left of them, sir."

And even Anselm Simmons, who was not famed for his delicacy, thought it wise to inquire no further.

Two days later the furniture came—not so much as had gone away, by any means, and no horses, no carriages. Then came the family itself—what there was left of it. Quite a crowd awaited them at the station, for Campeau had appeared, fifteen minutes before train time, in a carriage from Hayford's livery-stable. He was dressed in the black clothes in which he had arrived; and these, with his quaint, flat hat and his pale, chastened face, gave him the air of a queer little priest who had been snatched up by genie hands from his quiet parish across seas and dropped in this alien land.

When the train drew in, the crowd had eyes for nobody but the Priestleys, and felt quite aggrieved at Isaac Buggs, the fattest and slowest man in Tellfair, for appearing first and blocking the platform of the car. Next came Mrs. Buggs—almost as fat and slow as Isaac—and after her Miss Alluvia Buggs, all from a shopping expedition to Chicago. A travelling salesman next stepped down, followed by a second. Were they never coming? Then, after a pause, came—a Priestley. One who knew the family by reputation only would have recognized her—tall, dark, and slender, with an indefinable air of distinction. Behind her came a sister—fair-haired, blue-eyed, and not quite so tall. This must be Victoria—a girl of sixteen when Tellfair last saw her—for there was only one light one in the family. The first might be Josephine, for she was nearest Victoria's age. This settled, the

The Pride of Tellfair

spectators waited for the next one. But no next came. These two, Tellfair was soon to know, were all that the terrible Yellow Jack had spared out of seven.

Campeau advanced, bareheaded. His mistresses smiled brightly upon him as they turned over their handbags and exchanged a few words—in English, those nearest to them noted. Then he led them to the carriage.

Had the fair pair been angels warm-winged from heaven, Campeau could not have handed them in more tenderly or paid them more reverence. When he had tucked the light lap-robe around them, he gravely took his seat beside the driver, like a master of ceremonies, and nodded that all was ready. The carriage rolled off in a cloud of dust, and Tellfair had entered, in a sense, upon a new era.

As the girls crossed their front yard, which Campeau had had no time as yet to reclaim from the weeds and rank grass, and glanced at the tangled shrubbery, the cracked basin of the fountain, and other evidences of neglect and decay, their hands stole together in a tight, protracted embrace, and Victoria blinked rapidly behind her veil.

Inside, however, Campeau had taken the minutest care to reproduce the old home so far as the reduced furniture would permit. The piano occupied the same corner of the front room. Against it leaned the guitar of the dead Honoria, just as she used to leave it, and still wearing the blue ribbon she had tied around it only three days before her tragic death. Above the instruments hung the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Priestley. Chairs, tables, and rugs were all in their old places; and the library might never have been closed, so naturally were books and papers strewn about.

The last room to which Campeau led them was their own, on the second floor front. An old-fashioned can-

The Pride of Tellfair

opied bed, with purple hangings, stood out diagonally from one corner; a brass-legged dressing-table stood opposite, and a little ash secretary occupied its old place between the windows. On a table in the centre lay a heap of blossoms from the garden.

The young women had thus far carried themselves with commendable poise, despite the tugging at their heartstrings at almost every turn. But as Josephine lithely stooped and buried her nose in the sweet cluster of blooms, their fragrance, with the associations they stirred, was the drop too much for her brimming heart. Hastily lifting her head, with dilated nostrils, she gasped once or twice, and then threw herself upon the bed with a stifled cry.

Victoria stood pale and motionless. For a moment old Campeau looked gravely and sorrowfully at the stricken young figure, and then he delicately turned and left the room.

VI

THE neighbors of the Priestleys—some of them—watched the brown house during the days that followed as closely as their consciences and house-work would allow. In some instances, this was very closely indeed. Old Nancy Betts moved her sewing-machine from the east window, which was cooler, to the west window, which overlooked the Priestleys'. There she sweat through the sultry afternoons without a murmur, for by using her split lenses—one for short range, the other for long—she was able both to watch and sew, and this without losing either a stitch or the flutter of a lace curtain in the big house among the trees.

But even she noted nothing for a day or two which could be blown into news. On the third day, though, she got a good look at one of the girls for the first time. The yellow-haired Victoria appeared on the front porch, dressed with care, raised her white sunshade, and passed down the gravelled walk to the street.

Tellfair presented no fairer sight that morning than this girl with the nodding roses on her hat and the firm, white arms gleaming coolly through her thin sleeves. As she stepped from the board sidewalk into the beaten footpath which made a diagonal cut across the court-house square, she folded her sunshade, like a butterfly folding its wings, and gathered her skirts about her, with a pretty, snuggling motion, to save them from pollution by the dusty grass.

Thus far she had met no one on the quiet morning

The Pride of Tellfair

streets. But as she emerged from the square a dilapidated buggy, drawn by a sleepy, gray horse, rattled by in a cloud of dust. To Victoria's surprise, the white-haired old gentleman inside, who shared the age and dilapidation of his horse and buggy, courteously lifted a worn glove to his old-fashioned black straw hat. It was Dr. Burney, who seldom passed any woman without this mark of respect; and Victoria, who could not claim a single acquaintance in Tellfair, six years her home, felt a mist of gratitude in her eyes.

She turned in at a combination drug-and-book store on Main Street. The clerk was chaffing two young women who sat at the soda-fountain, sipping frothy drinks. Conversation instantly ceased at Victoria's entrance, and as she walked to the rear of the store, where she saw some book-shelves, she felt that the curious eyes of the girls were upon her.

"I should like a cook-book," said she, in a low but clear tone, when the clerk came back. The tint in her cheek may have deepened a trifle, but no one would have suspected therefrom the struggle which had preceded her decision to make this purchase in person, instead of sending Campeau. For Campeau was no longer to act as a buffer for the Priestleys. Henceforth, the public, instead of being systematically avoided, was to be openly and frankly met. The reason appeared later.

"We have two or three different ones," said the clerk, naming them. "Which one would you like?"

Victoria hesitated an instant.

"I am not familiar with any of those names, I believe," she answered, as if there might be a great many other cook-books, and possibly better ones, with whose names she was familiar. "I should like the best one, though. Do you know which of them is considered the best?"

The Pride of Tellfair

"This is the most complete."

He took down a volume whose bulk fairly staggered the girl, her idea of a cook-book being a handy little paper-backed affair which could be slipped behind the kitchen clock or tucked under one's apron-string. She opened it, though, and made a brave show of looking it over; but in her confusion a blur of black and white was all she saw.

"Is it all just—recipes?" she asked, rather faintly, suspecting, perhaps, that the fat volume contained a history of cooking also, and possibly the lives of the world's famous chefs—a line of biography in which she was not interested.

On being assured that it contained only recipes, she said she would take it, and fished the price—two dollars—out of her little net purse. But she had scarcely parted with the money, once so plentiful, now so scarce, before she looked wistfully at the smaller and cheaper books, either one of which would have more than answered her purpose. She sorely wanted to make a change; but the big book was now being wrapped up, and the new resolutions of economy were too green and tender, the old pride too deep-rooted and tough. Yet her conscience hurt her as she walked home. Josephine would not have been so weak, she told herself.

Victoria was a Priestley rather than a Joncaire (her mother's family); and as no Joncaire, so far as remembered, had ever got beyond a chafing-dish stage in the culinary art, she had elected to do the cooking under the new régime. But cooking as prescribed in her new book was not the simple process she had always imagined it; and when she recalled the ease with which old black Flossie—now lying, poor thing, in a fever trench!—used to get up a grand dinner for forty or more, it seemed to her that a great person had passed unhonored and unsung.

The Pride of Tellfair

However, she valorously attacked the formulas in the book. She kept Campeau trotting half the time between the house and the stores for the endless ingredients called for by the recipes, and winced at their rapidly growing grocery bills. She measured out spices, baking-powders, flour, and milk as carefully as a prescription clerk measures out the deadliest drugs. She timed her baking to the second, and hovered over the range until, between heat and anxiety, her cheeks were as red as the peonies along the garden-wall.

But, alas! cakes fell; pies ran over, or scorched or turned soggy; bread seemed determined to be either underdone or overdone, and the witches took possession of the coffee-pot. The climax was reached at breakfast on the fourth morning. She guiltily placed on the table some objects which, according to the cook-book, should have been Parker-house rolls, but which their originator certainly would never have recognized, or at least owned.

Josephine heroically attacked one of the sodden lumps of dough, and tried to look unconscious; but Victoria, after choking down a mouthful or two, hastily arose and left the room. Josephine finished her breakfast—it did not take long—and followed with a knowing smile. She found her sister on the library couch, softly crying. She sat down on the edge, and laid her hand soothingly on the other's yellow head.

"Vic, you can't cook any more than a rabbit, and nobody could expect you to. Cooking doesn't run in our family. We've never been trained to it. We'll hire a cook for a while, although we can't afford it, and you will learn more from her in a week than you could in a year from that deceitful cook-book. It will really be cheaper, too, I believe, because it seems to me that some delivery-boy is here about half the time. Vic, you don't flirt with them!" She dropped down

The Pride of Tellfair

and laughed in the other's neck, and Victoria gave her a squeeze.

Campeau ate after his mistresses. As soon as he was done his breakfast, Josephine despatched him in search of a cook; and she declared mischievously to Victoria that he moved off with more alacrity than she had seen him display in many a day.

That afternoon, Mrs. Betts reported to her next-door neighbor, as the second noteworthy event of her four days' watch, that both the Priestley girls had gone down-town—"And dressed pretty well for people presumin'ly poor, *I* should say," she added, severely.

About the time she was making this report, the young women entered Morris Davenport's office. They saw a man tilted back in a chair, with his back towards them, and his feet cocked up on the window-sill. His hands were clasped behind his auburn head, and the smoke of a cigar drifted upward in blue wreaths.

"Bertha, if I should be out when Ole Oleson calls this afternoon, and he tries to put you off again on that bill of Trimmer's, tell him to pay to-day, or to-morrow I shall have an officer out at his place bright and early to take a cow or two. His lying excuses were amusing for a while, but his ingenuity seems to have petered out, and he is getting commonplace."

There was no "Bertha" in sight, and the sisters glanced at each other in embarrassment over their unwitting eavesdropping. Then Josephine said:

"I beg your pardon, but is this Mr. Davenport?"

Davenport brought his feet to the floor rather hastily, laid his cigar on the window-sill, and arose. The act revealed to the girls a square, sharply cut face and a sturdy, well-knit figure—the face and figure of a man of action.

"I beg *your* pardon! I thought it was my stenographer who had come in," he said, meeting their smile

The Pride of Tellfair

half-way. "You are the Miss Priestleys, I believe. Just step this way, please." And he threw open his private office.

"We came up to find out something about the mortgage on our house, Mr. Davenport," said Josephine, at once. "I believe there is such a mortgage."

Wondering at their naïve ignorance about a matter of such importance, he stated briefly that there was originally a mortgage of five thousand dollars on the property, but that it had been reduced to two; that it was held by one Bradley Hayford; that the interest was six per cent. per annum, or one hundred and twenty dollars, and that this interest fell due in the fall.

"I suppose you know," he added, though sure she did not, "that last year's interest was not paid. There is, therefore, two hundred and forty dollars due this year."

Josephine's beautiful face turned a bit paler.

"There must be some mistake about that, Mr. Davenport," said she, quickly. "We have never heard anything about it from our father's attorney."

"I am very sorry, but it is certainly true," answered Davenport. He was too old a hand to take umbrage at any reflections from a woman on his accuracy. "There is no reason why your attorney should not have told you, for he wrote me a letter last fall asking me to renew the mortgage, and to make arrangements to carry the interest over. I have his letter, if you would like to see it."

"Oh no," said Josephine, apologetically. "Your word is sufficient, of course. If such a letter was written, the interest has not been paid."

She dropped her eyes. It was painful to be reminded by a stranger of those terrible days when death and financial disaster, like twin demons, had made wreck of their home.

The Pride of Tellfair

"We will pay the interest for both years, of course," she concluded.

"If anything should happen that you can't do it conveniently," said Davenport, respectfully, "I would say that the property will stand a much heavier indebtedness, and that I can handle the matter without troubling you further. I presume, though, it is your policy not to increase the mortgage if possible."

"Yes," said she, and gave him a shy glance of gratitude.

There was no doubting the kindness of those reddish-brown eyes. Both she and Victoria had nerved themselves for this visit. Brought up in almost nun-like innocence of practical affairs, they shrank from them; and after their experience in New Orleans, when minions of the law swooped down on them like hawks upon motherless chicks, they had a positive terror of lawyers. Davenport's implication, therefore, that he was with them, not against them, came as a revelation and relief.

"When does the mortgage itself fall due?" asked Victoria, with a pretty show of legal acumen.

"The same time as the interest," said he, hiding a smile.

"But it doesn't have to be paid then?" she exclaimed, in dismay.

"Oh no. You can renew it again. A mortgage of this kind falls due annually, but it can be renewed indefinitely as long as both parties agree to it."

"But suppose that Mr.—the man that holds it—won't agree to it?" asked Josephine, with new uneasiness.

"He will. If he doesn't, somebody else will. You can trust me to take care of that."

Josephine was more than thankful to do this, and yet she was not quite satisfied.

The Pride of Tellfair

"When can a person foreclose a mortgage?" she asked, anxiously.

Davenport explained foreclosure, and convinced them that they were in no danger of being turned into the street. They then arose to go, but he suggested, with a glance outside, that they wait a little lest they get wet.

The day had been oppressively hot and still, but within the last few minutes the temperature had fallen perceptibly, and little puffs of wind were bellying Davenport's curtains and rustling the papers on his desk. A herd of black, savage clouds was coming up the western sky, their heads lifted high, and horns tossing threateningly in the agitated air, as if looking for that which they might destroy.

The wind, suddenly stiffening, seized the topmost boughs of a neighboring maple and bent them back until the whitish undersides of the leaves were turned up—like a rude lover tilting the shy face of a maid for a kiss. The inky cloud-banks were veined with fire, and a low, sullen roar came forth, like the distant bellowing of a thousand bulls. Then the wind rose still higher; dust and leaves filled the air; the trees tossed their arms in terror, and now and then a limb gave way with a sharp report. The lightning, drawing nearer, shot down from the clouds in blinding flashes; and the thunder—a moment before majestic, deep-throated, like the roll of chariots in the hippodrome of heaven—became a mere rattling, crackling, ear-splitting musketry. Then came the rain, in a pitiless, beating, blurred torrent.

The trio sat in silence. Victoria, always sensitive to an electrical atmosphere, was awed; but Josephine, moodily tracing an analogy between the destructive storm and the disasters which had overwhelmed her family, sat with compressed lips, slightly distended

The Pride of Tellfair

nostrils, and defiant eyes, daring it to its worst. The unpaid interest had been a painful discovery, and its payment would make a terrible hole in the little sum which stood between them and penury.

Yet she might have carried her analogy further, for the storm, rough as it was, ministered to a thirsty earth and a sweltering humanity; and its sweet, moist, pure breath came in at the window like a benediction. Soon, too, the sun was out again, decking the trees with a million diamonds; and the birds, shaking off the last drops, began to pipe up their scattered mates.

"I think we'll go back to your cooking, Vic," said Josephine, as the pair, with lifted skirts, picked their way home between pools.

"You feel bad, dear, about that interest," said Victoria, sympathetically.

"I certainly don't feel good about it."

"Mr. Davenport said that, if we couldn't raise it, it would be all right."

"It won't be all right, though," answered Josephine. "He'll simply add it to the mortgage, and next year there will be more interest to pay. It now amounts to ten dollars a month, and we can't stand any more. If we fall behind on the interest, it is only a question of time until we sha'n't have a home."

"I suppose we could rent a cottage here for what we shall have to pay out as interest. If we could, and could sell the house—" She paused, doubtfully.

"Could you see that dear old place sold over our heads?" asked Josephine, quiveringly. "It's the last link that binds us to the past—the last thing to tell what we once were. Lose that, and we begin life over again, with all that has gone before as nothing. We should be just a pair of orphans, with nothing back of us or before us, any more than if we had dropped from the clouds. No; we'll keep the house, if we have

The Pride of Tellfair

to go hungry. It's our last anchor to family history."

"I don't want to give it up any more than you do, dear," protested Victoria. "I was just thinking what we could do if it came to the worst."

"I know you were. Forgive me," said Josephine, with instant penitence. "I am irritable and unkind to-day. I had made up my mind to be cheerful and brave, and to set *you* a good example." She smiled sorrowfully. "I have thought so much over how to make the little we have left go as far as possible! Then to have that little swept away in that cold, heartless way took the spirit right out of me."

"But *he* wasn't cold and heartless," observed Victoria, justly.

"No," admitted the other. "He was as good and kind as he could be. But he did speak of it as though it were a mere trifle—a mere after-thought."

"It didn't strike me that way," said Victoria. "I don't suppose he knows how perilously near we come to being paupers. But if he had known, and dared to show it, how you would have bristled!" she added, laughing.

"I don't know," answered Josephine, moodily. "I don't believe my bristles will ever rise again. Music-teachers are better off without such weapons, I fancy."

"I'm going to retain mine until I get my first pupil, at least," declared Victoria, threateningly. "We forgot to speak to Mr. Davenport about our music."

"I didn't have the heart to, after what happened. We'll go up and see him again to-morrow. He's the kind of a man, I fancy, that knows how to do things. I am so glad that he's not some fussy old gentleman ready to take us under his wing."

VII

HOW still the old house was after dark! The girls pulled their chairs through the French windows on to the side porch, and rocked for hours. How still, also, was the village! Here on the outskirts there was hardly a sound except the trill of the little frogs in a neighboring pond and the grating of the katydids, and these intensified rather than relieved the silence.

One or two passing vehicles to the evening, and one or two pedestrians to the hour, measured the life on the street. A catbird, hidden somewhere in the misty, moonlit maze of the garden, would occasionally emit a low, fitful strain, as if singing in its sleep. There was something sweetly solemn in this nocturnal music, when all other little feathered heads were tucked away under wings.

Sometimes the wail of a cabinet-organ floated mournfully across the garden wall from their next-door neighbor's, whose name they did not yet know. This night they heard singing in the distance, as if a party of young people had gathered. The air and words were lost in space, but now and then a clear, beautiful tenor rose high above the chorus into the blue ether of night, like a soul slipping from its clay. For a breathless moment the bell-like notes would sustain themselves on empyrean heights; and then, their brief life over, sink, dying, to earth again.

Tears glistened in the eyes of both girls—cool, soothing, restful tears—heart's-ease. It was a dream-hour,

The Pride of Tellfair

but the odor of Campeau's pipe around the corner, where he too sat dreaming, gave it a wholesome touch of earth and reality.

"I feel that we are going to be happy here—happier than we should have been in New Orleans," said Josephine, softly. "Though we hardly know a soul, I feel at home already. The very houses look hospitable and neighborly, and kindness is in the air. Nobody is very rich here, apparently, but everybody seems fairly prosperous. Campeau says there are no really poor people here—nobody absolutely destitute. A person couldn't lie sick here and starve to death, as they do in the cities," she added, with a slight shudder. "If our blinds should be shut for a day, somebody would be around to see what the trouble was. I know I have idealized the town, yet I feel that the reality will not be disappointing. I never want to see New Orleans again. I feel as though we had escaped from some cruel nightmare. Our beloved dead are the only tie. Sometimes I feel that they are still there—out there in that terrible, terrible—"

"Oh, don't, dear!" said Victoria, taking her sister's hand. "They are not there. If they are anywhere on earth, it is here with us, in the old home."

"Watching to see that we do our work bravely and well," added Josephine, returning the pressure of her sister's hand.

"And to cheer us when we falter."

"Only we won't falter—we won't start out with that in mind. We'll make a winning fight. A bare living is not much to ask of the world. Some don't get even that, I know; but they haven't as much to start with as you and I—education and musical training and social advantages—and blood. They were born with their faces in the dust."

In the morning, Victoria was too busy with the house-

The Pride of Tellfair

work to dress and go down-town; and Josephine, after some hesitation, concluded to call on Mr. Davenport alone. To her relief she found him unengaged; not even his stenographer was present.

"I am going to take you at your word about helping us out," she warned him, smiling.

"I was only afraid you wouldn't," he returned.

"I want to speak to you about our personal affairs," she began at once, to have the plunge over. "My sister and I are under the necessity of earning our living. We have thought the matter over, and have concluded that the best thing for us to do—and about the only thing we can do—is to teach music. Either of us could teach French, too, if anybody wanted it. Now do you think you could tell us how to go at it—how to make a start to get pupils? We know no one here, and have had no experience. I don't suppose you have, either, for that matter," she added, half apologetically.

"I make it a point to give advice on all subjects, whether I have had experience or not," he answered, with a gleam of fun, drawing a pad of paper towards him. "I have never taught music, I must confess, but between us I shouldn't be surprised if we could work out a plan. Now tell me just what you and your sister can teach."

"Victoria can instruct on the mandolin, guitar, and piano; I can teach vocal music, and either of us can teach French. I don't suppose there is any demand for the last here, though."

"Demand creates supply, according to political economy, but I have known supply to create demand. It won't do any harm, anyhow, to let people know that they can have French if they want it." He wrote for a moment or two, and then read, aloud: "'The undersigned will instruct a limited number of pupils in French and both vocal and instrumental music—piano,

The Pride of Tellfair

mandolin, and guitar. For particulars call on or address'—and then your names will be signed," he added. "You take that notice down to the *Visitor* and the *Citizen*—I'll make you two copies—and tell them that you want it run in the local column, just once. That will be sufficient. The papers come out Thursday evening, and by Friday noon every man, woman, and child in Tellfair will know that the Miss Priestleys are going to take music pupils."

Josephine blushed, for he evidently meant that the announcement would make a tidy bit of gossip. Then she read the notice through for herself.

"I believe I'd sooner leave that word 'limited' out," she suggested, timidly.

"Why?"

"Because we'll take *all* the pupils we can get."

"Would you take a thousand?"

"We can't get a thousand," she parried, smiling. "It isn't quite honest—do you think?" she continued, more seriously. "It rather intimates that we are teaching only for amusement, or something of that kind. I think it's best to let the people know in the beginning that we are teaching because we have to."

"Then I guess we had better take it out," he answered, secretly pleased at her conscientiousness. "What church, if any, do you attend, Miss Priestley—if I may ask?" he continued, remembering that they had attended none during their former residence in Tellfair.

"We attend none regularly. My mother was a Catholic, and we used to go with her when we went at all."

"I should like to see you and your sister at the Presbyterian Church next Sunday morning. As your legal, not your spiritual, adviser," he added, at her surprised look. "You can extend your acquaintance

The Pride of Tellfair

more quickly that way here than in any other. The church is the social centre, in a way, in these small towns, and the best people are in it—nominally, if not actively. By attending church you identify yourself with them at once."

Miss Priestley studied the paper in her hand with a doubtful face.

"Of course, if you have any religious scruples about attending a Protestant church, I should not want you to go," he added.

"I have no such scruples," she answered, slowly, "but I dislike exceedingly to attend any church under the guise of a worshipper for the purpose of—well, of making money, to put it honestly."

She lifted her lustrous, violet eyes gravely, and Davenport saw that he had struck another reef in his free-and-easy navigation of the waters of her conscience. It surprised him the more as he, with the rest of Tellfair, had believed the no-church Priestleys the last people in the world to balk at a peccadillo.

"There is some difference between making money and making a living," he answered, sympathetically. "But even if there wasn't, the path of profit and the path of duty happen to be the same in this case. You ought to get acquainted with the people. You ought to know them socially as well as professionally, for your sake and for theirs. In fact, in a little town like this, you *must*."

"We want to," she answered, quickly, as if to disclaim any intention of maintaining the family's former exclusiveness. "We are lonely. Nobody has called on us. Outside of our household—and it's very small now—you are the only person I have spoken to since we came. My sister went down-town the other day and bought a cook-book," she continued, smiling, "and talked to the clerk, so that she feels as if her acquaint-

The Pride of Tellfair

ance were quite extended, compared with mine. We can't be happy living this way, and we don't intend to try it. But this idea of using the church—really, Mr. Davenport, it grates on me."

"Take my word for it, it's a perfectly moral act. I'm a member of the Board of Elders of the Presbyterian Church, and you can rely on what I say." His eye may have twinkled. "One of the ends of the church is to promote the material welfare of its members as well as the spiritual. You'll find it in the Confession of Faith. A Presbyterian aims to buy Presbyterian groceries, wear Presbyterian clothes, and to have Presbyterian fillings put in his teeth. It's perfectly proper, too. Why shouldn't his children have Presbyterian music also?"

"But the Methodists and Baptists. We should like them, too."

"You can have them. Going to one church won't cut you off from the others. You can't attend but one, consistently, of course; and I mention the Presbyterian because in this particular town it happens to be the strongest. It embraces more wealthy and influential families than either of the others. Think it over, Miss Priestley, and you and your sister will appear at church next Sunday morning, I am sure. Meantime, print that notice, and be sure that it goes into both papers. It will only cost about five cents a line. One paper would give it nearly as much publicity as the two, but the neglected editor would at once class you with the partisans of the other paper, and it's worth fifteen or twenty cents to retain his good-will."

When Josephine put the question of attending church to Victoria, the latter laughed.

"Of course we'll go. I see Mr. Davenport's idea. If you have a circus, you must give a parade."

The Pride of Tellfair

Yet she dressed for church, the following Sunday, in a worshipful enough mood, for she wore for the first time a garment from one of her dead sisters' wardrobes—a shirt-waist of Honoria's. In their reduced condition, she and Josephine had concluded to wear these clothes rather than pack them away for moth and rust to corrupt.

She lifted the filmy fabric tenderly, as if it were sanctified with the spirit of the dead; and Josephine, helping her sister to dress, fumbled blindly through her tears at the little gold safety-pins as she recalled the day on which Honoria had worn this waist last—when Zénobe Chouinard had taken them for a sail on Lake Pontchartrain.

As they passed out of the house, Campeau was pacing slowly back and forth in the shade, his hands clasped behind his back and his chin lying upon his breast, in the pensive attitude habitual with him of late. It was a sweltering morning, but Campeau was superior to any caprice of the weather, and was buttoned to the throat in his stuffy black clothes. It was far from Campeau to censure, even in his mind, any of his mistresses' doings; but as he saw them on the way to a Protestant sanctuary the rigid old Catholic could not refrain from crossing himself and murmuring a prayer. The girls detected the motion, slight as it was, and it added to their seriousness.

The Methodist and Baptist churches, both of which they passed, were already surrounded by long lines of teams from the country, embracing every style of vehicle, from ancient family "arks"—almost high enough to have served as veritable refuges from a flood—to shining modern surreys. It was, therefore, a little late when they reached the Presbyterian Church.

To make matters worse—or better, regarding their entrance as a parade—the usher led them nearly to

The Pride of Tellfair

the front. It looked as if Davenport might have given him instructions. Heads were turned on either side as the pretty pair rustled fragrantly up the aisle. The choir, exercising an immemorial privilege of choirs, eyed them unflinchingly until they sank down in their pews and devoutly bowed their heads in a brief, silent prayer. This last, merely a part of their ritualistic training, created a greater sensation even than their appearance, for among the legends about the family was one to the effect that they were atheists.

The simplicity of the service was a revelation to the young women, accustomed to the pomp and ceremonial of a great cathedral. They were also surprised, and a little shocked, at the informality of the worshippers—their easy, not to say lounging, postures—their occasional whisperings, and the freedom with which they gazed about. But the sermon was a pleasure, especially to the thoughtful Josephine. The Reverend Arthur Bowman had a more than local reputation as thinker and orator, and his words this morning were truly edifying.

After the benediction the sisters lingered a moment in their pew—waiting for pupils, Victoria irreverently whispered. Then a woman, hardly older than themselves and dressed in admirable taste, brushed into the pew with extended hand.

"I am Mrs. Bowman, the pastor's wife," she began, cordially. "You are the Miss Priestleys, I believe. Indeed, I *know* you are," she added, charmingly, "and so does everybody else here. I'm so glad to see you out in spite of the hot weather. Mr. Bowman says this weather is Satan's own—it reduces the attendance so. I'm not sure whether that is swearing or not. But he isn't a farmer, you know, with a hundred acres of ripening corn. And perhaps if he could wear shirt-waists"—she glanced with feminine fleetness at the

The Pride of Tellfair

girls'—"instead of that awful black coat, he wouldn't speak so absolutely. But it really is discouraging, when he toils all week to get up a sermon—Mrs. Venner, I want you to meet Miss Priestley—and her sister. Mr. Venner, also, and—come here, Dorothy—Miss Venner."

She briskly introduced the girls right and left, at the same time protecting them, front and flank, with a Gatling-gun fire of comment, interjection, and explanation, which was a marvel of rapidity, precision, and continuity. Still, Josephine managed to glance around once or twice, half-expecting to see the square, auburn head of Morris Davenport. It was not in sight, but she did see the dark, bushy head of the minister zigzagging towards her as fast as its bearer could edge through the press, shaking hands on the fly, as it were, with those whom he politely thrust out of his way.

"I want to thank you for that sermon, Mr. Bowman," said Josephine, when the clergyman had been presented. "It's a great pleasure, not to say comfort, to hear some one in authority voice the opinions one has been cherishing in a half-guilty secrecy for a long time. I believe, with all my heart, as you said in your sermon, quoting from Emerson, that the farmer kneeling to weed his field is making the best prayer in the world for a good crop."

A subtle change of expression took place on Mrs. Bowman's face. She still smiled and listened suavely—almost too suavely—but Josephine detected a vague, remote uneasiness in her gray eyes. It was explained the next moment.

"It's an equal comfort, I assure you, Miss Priestley, for one in authority, as you put it, to meet with such sympathy from the pew—especially when it has failed him from a nearer source." He glanced at his wife

The Pride of Tellfair

playfully, yet significantly. "Now, Mrs. Bowman thinks that sermon little short of heresy."

Mrs. Bowman looked frankly and sweetly into Josephine's dark eyes, as if apologizing for this uncovering of a little domestic difference; but she was too conscientious to gloss it over.

"No; I said I could not agree with him—and I can't—and that *some* people might think the sermon heresy. But it is entirely too hot for a theological controversy to-day," she exclaimed, resuming her sunny air. "The real question is whether we are to have Miss Priestley and her sister 'for keeps' or not—as I heard our boy say the other day at marbles, and which his father complacently informed me was a gambling term. Think of it! But I want you, in any event, to promise to come to our lawn sociable next Friday night, at the manse, on your street, about six blocks east. The whole town will be there—Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians—and I want you to meet our young people. We haven't many. They drift away from the village in a terribly discouraging fashion as soon as they grow up and get interesting. But I want you to meet what we have. There's another terrible feature about our town, which I hardly dare disclose. There are about five young women here to one young man. But you are welcome, just the same," she added, gayly. "That is, if you promise to join our A. F. Society. 'A. F.' stands for Anti-Flattery, and the society's avowed end is to reduce the swelled heads of our village beaus by withholding every grain of praise not necessary to cajole them into turning ice-cream freezers at church sociables, and so forth. They form here what I call the Tyrannical Minority, and they need disciplining."

"Five to one!" exclaimed Victoria, waggishly, on the way home. "A cheerful prospect for two marriage-

The Pride of Tellfair

able young women, I must say. A fifth of a man apiece! You or I, by resigning in the other's favor, would be entitled to two-fifths. Diplomacy might add another fifth, coquetry still another, and I suppose a girl might, by an out-and-out steal, acquire the last fifth necessary to a whole. I'll resign forthwith in your favor, Jo, if you will promise to hire me for life to cook for you and your happy five-fifths."

This chaff blew about Josephine's ears unheeded, although she smiled absent-mindedly.

"Didn't you rather expect to see Mr. Davenport there this morning?" she asked.

"Yes, I did. I supposed he would at least want to see how the parade went off when he was managing it."

"Drop that circus talk, Vic," said Josephine, laughing. "It makes one feel like a bareback rider or a snake-charmer. I saw his stenographer there. She's the prettiest girl I have seen here so far."

"You will remember I remarked the other day that Mr. Davenport showed excellent taste in the furnishings of his office," observed Victoria, slyly. "She looked rather insipid, though, I thought."

"She didn't come up to be introduced, and I rather thought she avoided us."

"So did I. Perhaps as a trusted lieutenant of Mr. Davenport's her duty required her to stand aside and observe effects."

VIII

DAVENPORT was not at church, he explained later, because he had spent Sunday with his parents, in the country. The relations between father and son were curious enough. During the day they exchanged a hundred words, perhaps. Morris and his mother did all the talking, while the silent little man scarcely seemed to listen. The thousand and one projects in which Morris was entangled, and which he confided fully to his mother, apparently possessed no interest whatever for his father.

Yet, as a matter of fact, Davenport senior missed not a single word. Though he failed to give his son half a dozen sentences of praise or advice, there were moments when his pale-blue eyes lit with pride in spite of himself. In truth, he was inordinately fond of his son, in his dumb, pathetic way; and whether Morris strolled out to the barn or the orchard or the colt pasture, the father would soon noiselessly appear, as if by chance, with a straw or blade of grass in his mouth. He might say nothing; he might, indeed, excuse his presence by pottering around a break in the fence or a loose gate-hinge. But his son could never get far away from him.

Yet this silent, softly moving little man was by no means a nonentity. If he had been, he could hardly have won the love of Hester Madison. He owned the finest farm in the county; he was known and respected for miles around, and his beneficent influence over

The Pride of Tellfair

township affairs was shown in its roads and bridges, which were models for every other township in the county.

Few men had seen him angry, but those who had did not care for a second sight. He used no tobacco. Time was when he looked with disfavor upon smokers, and, other things being equal, preferred non-smokers for farm-hands. Until Morris grew up and came back from the university the odor of tobacco was unknown in the house. He said nothing, though, when he saw the first cigar in Morris's mouth, and never afterwards opened his lips on the subject.

One day when Morris had accidentally left some cigars behind in the house, Mr. Davenport appeared at dinner looking rather pale. His wife at once detected smoke upon him, but she had not been his partner a quarter of a century in vain, and she said nothing—about either the smell of smoke or his pallor and lack of appetite. But, when he had gone out again, she laughed until the tears ran down her face. She knew her husband had been trying to emulate his darling son. But the darling son never heard of it.

Davenport did not return to Tellfair until Monday morning. Almost his first words to Bertha were, "Did the Priestley girls attend church yesterday?" When she briefly answered yes, he smiled.

"I suppose Mrs. Bowman looked after them."

"She introduced them around," she answered, vaguely.

"Did you meet them?"

"No." The tone was a trifle emphatic.

"Why not?" His geniality abated the least.

"There were so many that I preferred to wait until some other time, when there would be a chance of their remembering me."

"They couldn't have forgotten a member of the firm,"

The Pride of Tellfair

he returned, pleasantly. "I'll introduce you myself the next time they are up."

He shortly left the office and proceeded to the Congreve home. With his customary informality, he entered without knocking, and walked through to the kitchen. Volley was mixing bread, her plump, white arms bare to the elbows. She pushed a chair towards him with her foot, and ordered him to sit down.

"I can't stay but a minute," said he. "I want to see you on a little business. I presume you know the Priestley girls are going to give music-lessons."

"I presume I do. I've heard it from twenty different sources, besides reading it in the *Visitor* and the *Citizen*."

"They are clients of mine. I want to help them all I can. I think I see a way of killing two birds with one stone. The idea came to me yesterday, out at the farm. You know how often I have tried to make Harvey take something for the use of his law-books in my office. I think I see a way of getting even with his stubborn generosity."

"If that is one of your birds, you had better save your stone. But go on."

"Bertha ought to cultivate her voice. She has a sweet soprano, and she can't afford to neglect it. You can't stand the expense, I know; but I can, and I purpose to do it, as part payment for those books. But Harvey is to know nothing of that feature of it, and Bertha is to know nothing at all about it. That is, about who pays. What do you say?"

Volley leaned upon her strong arms reflectively, and Davenport wondered if she knew what a picture she made. He thought it likely.

"I suppose I ought to be as loath as Harvey to take pay for those books, in any form, from a man who has done as much for us as you have."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Don't call it pay, then. Call it a gift pure and simple. You and I don't need to stand on ceremony."

"I should love to have Bert take lessons," said she, hesitatingly.

"Then we'll have her take them," said he, rising, with his usual decision. "You can fix it up with Harvey."

"Sit down—you don't often see me at manual labor," said she, driving her floury fists into the lump of dough with exaggerated energy. "How many lessons a week do you want her to take—one or two?"

"Two. I'll let her off during the day to take them. You'll have to go and see Miss Priestley, of course, and make arrangements. The whole thing must be done in your name."

"I should insist on that—I want to see the inside of that house," answered Volley, frivolously. "You say you prefer I should say nothing to Bert about your paying for the lessons?"

"I don't prefer—I *insist*. No quibbling about that, Volley," said he, warningly. "I make secrecy a condition of my offer."

"You needn't be so tragic about it," said she, coolly. "What would be the harm if she did know?"

"None, perhaps. But there is no need to burden her with a sense of obligation to me. She seems to feel now, sometimes, as if her position in my office were a gift out of hand."

"It's the simple truth."

"No, it isn't," said he, earnestly. "Disabuse your mind of that. She earns every dollar I pay her. She's a first-class stenographer, and absolutely trustworthy. I don't want her to feel that the position is a gift. It hurts her independence, and harms her in other ways."

Volley would have liked to ask him what those other ways were. She had a lively curiosity about the

The Pride of Tellfair

relations between this man and her daughter. But, bold as she was, she hesitated. After he had gone, she spent a full five minutes in reflection on the subject—a rather prolonged period for her. She had some reasons for regarding him as a possible son-in-law, and the strongest motives for making him one. But whenever she had attempted to draw him out she had found him as prickly as a porcupine.

Her attempts to draw Bertha out had been hardly more successful. Bertha regarded her mother—justly, perhaps—more as an equal than a superior, more as a sister than a mother. She unbosomed herself only on occasion, and when she would have done the same with a chum. Yet the older woman was by far the subtler, and she finally arrived at the conclusion—from just such incidents as the Lincoln biography—that her daughter was more or less under Davenport's dominion.

Mrs. Congreve resolved to go and see the Priestleys the next day. But she was not to be the girls' first caller, for while they were reading in the study on Monday afternoon—Victoria stretched on a Morris chair, Josephine half lost in the depths of a great, high-backed seat—the old-fashioned gong on the front door suddenly clanged out harsh and loud. It was an unwonted sound in the quiet house, for in long, long years no one but stray agents and peddlers had rung the bell. Both girls leaped to their feet—Victoria with her hand upon her heart, her hair tumbled where she had lain upon it, and her eyes dark with excitement.

"A pupil!" she cried, under her breath. "Jo, go to the door—I'm as weak as a kitten. If it's for me, I shall faint."

"Don't do it yet," said Josephine, coolly, although her own heart was thumping fiercely. "It may be the water-works man with a bill—I saw a notice in the pa-

The Pride of Tellfair

per that water-rents were due. If it's he, you may have cause to faint. I don't know how much they charge."

"Oh, hurry, Jo!—hurry! They might go away!" broke in Victoria, in an agony of suspense, and pushed her more deliberate sister out of the room. "And if they want *me*, tell them I'm sick, or talking to the milkman, or any excuse."

She laughed foolishly and shut herself in the library. For fifteen minutes she fluttered back and forth, now and then pausing with her head in the air, like an alarmed antelope, as if to catch a word. She knew that she could have answered the bell herself, if necessary, without outward emotion; but there was something desperately exciting about a first pupil to a girl who had never earned a nickel in her life.

Josephine finally reappeared. She was as calm as ever, but there was a red spot on each cheek and a feverish brightness in her eyes.

"It *was* a pupil!" cried Victoria, after one quick glance, and then swiftly enclosed her sister in her arms. Josephine—cool, queenly Josephine—smiled indulgently, blinked rapidly two or three times, and then—yes, a tear stood in each eye.

"Yours or mine, honey?" asked Victoria.

"Mine, if we get her," answered Josephine. "It's not quite settled yet. Has it occurred to you, Vic, that it would be a convenience to our patrons if we should fix a price on our lessons?"

Victoria fell back aghast.

"What on earth did you tell her? I never thought of that."

"I crawled out the best way I could. I'm not certain whether I lied or not, but I think I did. I told her we had hardly expected any applications so soon—that was true enough—and that we had not really decided on our prices yet, but that we should probably

The Pride of Tellfair

be governed by the ones prevailing here. What are you grinning at? That gave her a chance to tell me what they were."

"What are they?"

"Seventy-five cents for vocal lessons, and about fifty for instrumental."

Victoria emitted a low whistle from between sweetly puckered lips.

"We paid five dollars! Who was it?"

"A Mrs. Spencer."

"Presbyterian?" Her eyes gleamed mischievously.

"I don't know. We didn't get as far as denominational preferences."

"Didn't mention the parade, either?"

Josephine shrieked with laughter at this buffoonery, she felt so good over the pupil in sight.

"No."

"Who sent her here?"

"Whom do you suppose?"

"Not our lawyer!" exclaimed Victoria, gleefully.

"Yes, our lawyer," retorted Josephine, drawing down the corners of her handsome mouth in droll mimicry.

"God bless him!"

"So say I," said Josephine. "At the same time it is well to remember that he takes his pay in coin of the realm, not benedictions, and it behooves us to earn a supply of the former without delay. I am going over to Mrs. Bowman's this minute, and ask her about prices."

Mrs. Bowman—and Mr. Bowman as well—had to confess her ignorance of 'music-teachers' prices in Tellfair. But after the trio had discussed the subject some time, she suddenly exclaimed:

"Why, Arthur, Morris Davenport will know, of course. How stupid of us! I'll ring him up. He's like one of our family, Miss Priestley," she explained,

The Pride of Tellfair

halting on the way to the telephone, "so it will go no farther. He knows everything, absolutely everything! I shouldn't be surprised if he could preach a better sermon than Arthur." She gave her husband a saucy glance. "And if you have *him* on your side, you can dispense with everybody else."

"This is certainly amusing," said Josephine, laughing and blushing. She then confessed how she had already taken Davenport into her confidence about the lessons. "But I did not think to ask about prices."

"Now let *me* confess," said Mrs. Bowman, briskly, returning a step or two. "Morris told me that you were going to give lessons—though he didn't say a word about your having been to see him, the deceitful man!—and we three—Morris, Arthur, and I—are in a little conspiracy to *boom* you. Not a word of thanks! We are perfectly selfish in it. At least, I am. You see, there are two musical factions in Tellfair, one headed by the Ladies' Schubert Club—peace to that master's ashes!—and the other by the Band. *We* belong to the Band."

"*She* does," interposed Bowman. "I occupy strictly neutral ground."

"He has to say so, being a minister, or there would be a deficit in his salary at the end of the year," returned his wife, in a breath. "I was going to say that the Band lacks a soprano soloist for their concerts, and your coming here and falling into our hands instead of the Schubert's is nothing less than providential. Now I'll telephone. But don't say a word while I'm gone, for I don't want to miss anything."

She glided swiftly away, and the next instant the telephone-bell rang energetically in an adjoining room. She returned a moment later with buoyant step and beaming face.

"Mrs. Spencer was right. Seventy-five cents for vo-

The Pride of Tellfair

cal, and fifty for instrumental, and whatever you can get for French, say fifty cents a lesson," she rattled off. "You didn't mention the French, but he did, and said he thought some of the Bovees might take. They claim to be of French descent, but probably never heard a syllable of the language. Yet those prices seem absurdly low, Arthur." She paused, dubiously. "I don't know what I paid in Springfield, but I know it was a great deal more than that."

"Springfield and Tellfair, my dear, are two different places," said Bowman, with that touch of sarcasm which salted all his speech, but was rarely offensive. "Do you happen to remember what salary the Presbyterian Church in Springfield paid your father? Just twice what the Presbyterian Church here pays me. It is low, Miss Priestley, ridiculously low, it must seem to you, fresh from a city. But everything else is low here—butter, eggs, meat, vegetables, rent, even the consolations of religion, as I just said."

"Everything except the people," said his wife, with a cheerful irony which Josephine felt sure her husband had taught her.

"Well, you'll find a number of cultured, whole-hearted, interesting people here," said Bowman, contrarily tacking off the other way. "Of course, they form a very small minority, as they do everywhere, and nowhere more so than in the cities. Take that man Davenport as an example, though he really stands in a class by himself. He's one of the most remarkable men I have ever known. His vitality is something amazing. After talking ten minutes with him I always feel as though I had been charged by a dynamo."

"Buy yourself an insulator, Miss Priestley!" cut in Mrs. Bowman.

"Fifteen years ago he was a barefooted farmer's boy, though by no means poor, coming to town every

The Pride of Tellfair

morning in the summer-time with eggs, poultry, and vegetables, and peddling them from house to house, and very likely selling them for all they were worth. You must see his father's farm some time. It's a model place. Morris has three farms of his own; but, as he rents them, they are not kept up like his father's."

"But he hasn't earned all those farms himself since he's been out of school, has he?" asked Josephine, wondering how long it would take her to accumulate a similar estate at seventy-five cents a lesson, and live meanwhile, besides.

"Not entirely. He inherited some money from an aunt. But the way he has turned it over since is amazing, to a preacher, at least. His law practice isn't so large, I imagine—that is, not lucrative, though he has all he can do. But he is a born speculator. He is a great lover of horses, for instance, and is constantly buying and selling them. Yet I fancy that his horses, so far from being an expensive luxury, as they would be to most men, actually make him money. A trade without a gain would have no fascination for him, no matter how good the animal he got. He has eight or ten blooded horses on hand now."

"And not one of them that a woman can drive," said Mrs. Bowman, in an aggrieved tone. "I believe he buys that kind on purpose."

"I know he does," said Bowman, with a malicious grin. "That is one way of saying they are good."

"Of course he's in politics," said Josephine.

"Yes, though he doesn't care for office. He's too busy. But he 'makes' the men who do care for them, in this county, at least, and the present representative in Congress from this district owes his election to Davenport."

"Don't you suppose he would accept an office like that, if he could get it?"

The Pride of Tellfair

"I shouldn't be surprised—for one term, at least. That would give him enough. Such an office doesn't afford a proper field for energies like his. I don't know whether he could be elected or not. A man of his fearless nature has lots of enemies."

Josephine was on the point of asking how a man of Davenport's parts could be content to remain in so circumscribed a sphere as Tellfair, but doubted the tact of such a question to one who was also a resident of Tellfair, and a professional man.

Upon reflection, Davenport's did not seem so circumscribed a sphere, after all. To be the first man in the community; to dominate its politics, and pull wires which reached as far as the national capitol; to be growing rich; to be considered an oracle by such clever people as the Bowmans—these were surely not small things. She could call to mind men in New Orleans—men of high position, too—who had not half this outlook; whose lives moved in a much smaller circle than Davenport's.

IX

ON the night of the sociable the manse lawn was gayly lighted with strings of Japanese lanterns and studded with little white-clothed tables. When the Priestleys arrived these tables were full, and groups stood waiting on every side. Evidently ice-cream sociables were popular in Tellfair. But so, in fact, they learned later, was everything which offered an excuse for a social gathering.

In the centre of the lawn, under a constellation of flaring torches, sat the Tellfair Brass Band, in neat, dark-blue uniforms. At the present moment the members had laid aside their instruments for silver spoons, and the way they balanced their plates of cake and cream on their laps indicated that they had assisted before at functions of this kind. Josephine smiled as she recalled Tellfair's musical factions, and wondered if any of the Schubert Club ladies were present. She found that they were, and without war-paint, too.

At this moment Mrs. Bowman, flying by in a bee-line from the lawn to the summer kitchen, where the freezers stood, spied the girls. She was flushed with business, but calm as a veteran general in battle. At sight of the girls she instantly swerved from her course and bore down upon them under full sail.

"This is providential. The band is just cooling itself off with cream, and is in a beautiful state of mind to be impressed. Follow me!"

They followed, not quite clear as to their guide's

The Pride of Tellfair

designs. When she breezily presented them to the leader of the band, they were a little surprised. But when she marched them down the ranks, past cornets, clarionets, trombones, and saxophones, never stopping until she reached the bass drum, introducing them to each, the young women hardly knew whether to take her seriously or not. In their world, musicians at a social affair were usually paid functionaries; and though they might be thoroughly respected for their artistic accomplishments, they had no social value. They soon learned, however, that with these men music was merely a pastime; and that in daylight they were lawyers, doctors, dentists, bankers, and merchants—in short, substantial and representative citizens of Tellfair.

Later in the evening, after drifting away from Victoria and Mrs. Bowman, Josephine found herself in a little group whose nucleus was a hammock. In this hammock, stretched at full length, like a queen in the midst of her ladies of the bedchamber, lay a plump, florid-faced young woman, with lazy, flirtatious eyes. She drawled her words and exchanged verbal shots with the young men about her, and occasionally provoked them into a little romp with her.

This hoidenish freedom was decidedly distasteful to Josephine. The scrappy conversation circled persistently around local affairs, of which she knew next to nothing, and she would have felt somewhat forlorn had she not been diverted by a pretty, pink stripling of a boy, perhaps twenty years old. He had hung around her for a quarter of an hour, and was doing his best to amuse her. Finally, with some trepidation in his voice, he asked her if she danced. Upon receiving her affirmative, he asked for her company at a Knights of Pythias "party" to be given the following week. She thanked him gravely, but said she could

The Pride of Tellfair

not go. She felt rather guilty at the flush which overspread his downy face, for he evidently took her refusal as a rebuff.

At this moment she saw ploughing across the kaleidoscopic lawn, like a man-of-war among a fleet of pleasure craft, a square-shouldered, deep-chested figure of medium height, in a checked suit. There was no mistaking that aggressive motion—it was Morris Davenport. He was headed, apparently, for her group; and she wondered, with a flutter of uncertainty, whether their business relations constituted a social acquaintance. The code was puzzling, at times, in Tellfair. Her suspense was short, though, for Davenport brushed aside her doubts with a mailed hand, as it were.

"Mrs. Bowman deputed me to take care of you, Miss Priestley," he said, and extended his hand to greet her. It was a square, aggressive, determined hand, not easy to overlook. He cast his sharp eyes about in a rather critical manner, and added, in an undertone, "Is there anybody here that especially interests you?"

She smiled.

"I know where there are some that will. Right through here, please. Have you *creamed* yet?" he asked, with an ironical twist of the word.

She had heard some of the ladies use the word before that evening, and knew at whom he was thrusting. She confessed with a laugh that she had not "creamed," and he led her to a table occupied by several couples—a young doctor and his wife, as she learned, a brother lawyer and his wife, and one or two others. Davenport had reserved two chairs by tilting them forward—which a timid man would not have done until he had captured his partner. He was just turning these chairs back, after introducing Josephine, when a voice of exquisite sweetness caught her ear, just back of them.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Morris Davenport! Morris Davenport! Don't I hear your voice?"

Davenport instantly turned, with a pleased expression.

"Here's another friend that I want you to meet by all means," he murmured to Josephine, and stepped over to a neighboring table.

A tall, white-haired woman, as straight as an Indian, had arisen, but was still standing in her place, close to the chair, with a slim hand resting on the back of it, as for support—all in a timid, halting, slightly confused way. She seemed, too, to be looking past Davenport as he approached, rather than at him.

He covered the hand on the chair with his own, and kissed her, like a son. Her spiritual face lit with a smile whose freshness a girl might have envied. She turned, with an awkwardness strange in one so lithe, and then Josephine saw her eyes and forgot all else. They were large and round, as black as midnight in their pallid setting, with a peculiar, swimming lustre, like that of a bubble. They had also a puzzling fixity, a way of shooting above and beyond their object. But it was not until the stately dame had sunk into her chair again and said, "Kneel, Morris, I want to take a good look at you," and began to pass her delicate finger-tips over his face, that Josephine suspected the truth. Then she knew, with a sharp stitch in her side, that those glorious orbs were sightless.

Lovingly, lingeringly, with a touch almost as light as wandering thistle-down, the venerable woman's fingers drifted over Davenport's face from forehead to chin. Meantime, she smiled fondly, like a mother.

"I haven't seen you for *such* a long time, boy," she said, plaintively. "Why don't you come to see me any more? Yet it seems only yesterday that a little, freckled, red-headed, barefooted lad named Morry

The Pride of Tellfair

Davenport used to bring roasting-ears to my house, and picked out the big ones for me because I couldn't see, and kept the little ones for people who could see. I used to ask God to bless his little, honest soul! And now he's a man, they tell me, though I can't believe it, making speeches in court and driving fast horses and is getting rich. Let me see that brow again!" she said, with pretty imperiousness. "No—not one wrinkle yet. And that mouth! A little sober, but just as sweet as when it used to taste of blackberries and corn-silk cigarettes. If I kiss it again, before all these people, shall you be ashamed?"

"No, mother," he answered, and let her press his lips. Then, still kneeling, he added, "Mother Shipman, there's some one here I want you to know—Miss Josephine Priestley."

"This side, daughter," said Mrs. Shipman, holding out her left hand. When she felt Josephine's fingers she added, "I have often heard of you, and always to your honor. Won't you bend the knee, too, my dear, to satisfy a curious old woman?"

Josephine knelt and instinctively closed her eyes as the other laid her hands on her face. It was not necessary, for the sensitive finger-tips barely grazed her lashes.

"You are dark, daughter? I knew it! I can tell dark hair. And you sing, they say. I see that, too. Your throat is so full, like a bird's. Some time I should love to have you come and sing for me, and bring your sister with you. I want to see her, too."

"She is here to-night," said Morris. "We'll hunt her up for you after a little."

"All right—all right," answered the old lady, musingly. After a pause she added, thoughtfully stroking Josephine's thick hair, "Oh, your hair is so black—so black—just as mine used to be! *His* isn't black, is it?"

The Pride of Tellfair

laying her other hand on Davenport's head. "He is Thor the Thunderer. Be careful, daughter, that those fiery locks never burn you!"

"You are happy to-night, mother," said Davenport, smiling across at Josephine.

"Am I not always happy, Morris? Didn't you and I agree, one summer day, long, long ago—hear me talk, when it was only a day, an hour ago!—didn't we agree always to be happy, whether the world smiled or scowled? Didn't we also agree that it was not the world, but ourselves, who scowl? Yet, do you know," she added, sinking her voice confidentially, "there is a little rift within my lute to-night. I came off *without locking my front door!* I had the key right in my hand, mind you, and yet I didn't lock it. It doesn't make a bit of difference—who locks their doors in Tellfair?—but Stella has lived in the city so long that she doesn't feel easy if we leave a door unlocked of an evening. I wish, for her sake, that it was locked."

"Then it shall be locked," said Davenport, rising. "My horse is here, and it won't take five minutes."

"Oh, will you, Morris?" exclaimed the old gentlewoman, leaning forward eagerly and deftly extracting a key from the reticule at her belt. "You were always good to me, and now I can be perfectly happy the rest of the evening."

"If Miss Priestley will go along, she may have the honor of locking the door," said Davenport.

Josephine promptly consented. As she arose her eyes fell, by some occult attraction, upon the cold, hostile face of a young woman who had paused at some distance to watch the little drama around Mrs. Shipman's knees. For an instant the two women's eyes met squarely, and then the stranger turned coolly, almost insolently, away. Josephine had seen the face before, but it was not until she had puzzled several min-

The Pride of Tellfair

utes over its unaccountable expression that she recalled it as Davenport's stenographer's.

Davenport led the way to where a colt, hitched to a light road-wagon, was digging a hole with rapid hoof-beats, as if he decidedly objected to being tied to a post. Josephine smiled. Like master, like horse.

The dense banks of foliage on either side threw the streets into black shadow save for a thin, broken line of moonlight in the centre. Early as was the hour, they were almost as still and deserted as a country lane. The insect chorus of summer had hardly begun; the rubber-tired wheels rolled noiselessly along, and except for a faint creaking of the harness and the horse's muffled footfalls in the dust there was scarcely a sound.

For Josephine it was one of those rare, exquisite moments when happiness is almost overpowering—when the soul, for no apparent cause, fairly reels with joy—when an ethereal peace hovers over us, like angels invisible.

"Whenever I imagine myself a little ill-treated by fortune," said Davenport, in a low tone, as if in respect of the silence, "I always think of Mother Shipman's story. It never fails to make me ashamed of myself."

"Tell it to me," said Josephine.

"You must hear it from her own lips some time. It will do you good all your life. You see the kind of a woman she is—nobility stamped on her face, her voice, even her touch. Yet when she went blind, at twenty, she was a frivolous, wilful girl, according to my grandmother, and inordinately fond of dress and pleasure. She lived in New York State then, in the same town with my people. They all came West together. Grandmother used to tell the story of how Milly Vincent (Mrs. Shipman) climbed out of a second-story window one night and went to a dance, which she had been

The Pride of Tellfair

forbidden to attend, with a young army officer who happened to be home on furlough. Milly's mother, who seemed to know her daughter well, had locked up all the girl's finery in order to enforce her command. But Milly tiptoed up to the attic after everybody else in the house was asleep, and got her grandmother's wedding-gown out of an old chest. Doubtless she had masqueraded in it before, in front of her mirror if nowhere else. She made a great hit at the ball in the old-fashioned costume, which everybody supposed she had worn simply as an antic."

"I can see her audacious black eyes snapping now," murmured Josephine, with a smile.

"Well, when they lost their snap—were snuffed out by paralysis of the optic nerve—everybody said that she would die, that she would fret herself into the grave. She didn't even whimper, so far as the public knew; but her mother, who was half frightened by the girl's unexpected stoicism, would sometimes steal up to her room in the middle of the night and find her crying there, alone. But one night she told her mother that she would never cry any more, even when alone. She will tell you now that she never did."

"And she married happily?"

"Yes; she married a man who worshipped her to the day of his death, and she raised a family of children who are a credit to herself and the community, though they all left here long ago. Her daughter Stella, whom she mentioned, came back a few years ago, on her husband's death, to take care of the old lady."

They were skirting the court-house square. The old stone building, lifting its square roof above the silvered tree-tops, seemed asleep—asleep or dead. The white columns of the portico in front shone dimly through the intervening greenery like the ruins of an ancient temple in the heart of a sacred grove.

The Pride of Tellfair

"How beautiful and peaceful!" exclaimed Josephine, softly.

"Yes," assented Davenport. "Yet four weeks from to-day a man will be tried within those peaceful walls for his life. And he lies to-night in the jail in the rear." As they turned the corner he added, pointing, "There's his cell—the last one on the second floor."

Josephine glanced doubtfully at the barred window. She saw, or fancied she saw, a pale face in the gloom, and white, uplifted hands grasping the irons. She turned away with a slight shudder.

"Oh, to think that a human being should have to be caged like a wild beast!" she exclaimed.

"When he may be innocent," added Davenport.

She was silent a moment.

"I suppose that illustrates one of the differences between a man and a woman. I hadn't thought of his being innocent. I shrank from him as if he were already convicted."

"I have to defend him," said Davenport, as if in explanation of his remark.

She started a little. It brought the alleged murderer so much closer.

"I don't see how you sleep, standing between a fellow-being and death," she said, solemnly.

"Judge and jury share the responsibility," said he. "But in this case I suppose I do almost stand between this man and death. He is charged with murdering his employer, a farmer who lived ten miles east of here. The circumstantial evidence against him is very strong, and if ever there was an unlikely prisoner to win a jury with, it is this one. He's a foreigner—a Russian. He is dirty and unkempt, as repulsive a mortal as you ever saw, and talks a most barbarous jargon, which he imagines is English."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Do you have to go into his cell?" she asked, shrinkingly.

"Quite often."

"Do you—sit down?"

"Not if I can help it, but sometimes I do in self-defence. He has a way of dropping to his knees and clutching me around the legs and begging me to save his life."

"Oh, don't, please don't, Mr. Davenport!" she begged, with a shudder. "Let's not talk about it any more, or I shall dream about him to-night. Only I don't understand how you can have a moment's peace with such a burden on your shoulders. One little slip on your part may cost that poor wretch his life."

"Yes, only we lawyers don't look at it quite so seriously. As I said, judge and jury share our responsibility—and the higher courts, and the governor himself, who has the right to pardon. Therefore, if a man hangs, with all these safeguards about his liberty, we take it for granted that he ought to hang, and that we could not have saved his life in any event."

Mother Shipman's stately mansion was half a century old, and was a relic of the days when all Tellfair and many thousand acres besides were owned by three or four families. It stood high above the street on a natural elevation which ended abruptly at the sidewalk in an eight-foot embankment.

"That's a long flight of steps to climb," said Davenport, as they drew up to the horse-block. "I suppose you will not object to locking the door by proxy."

He handed her the lines and had crossed the sidewalk when she halted him.

"Mr. Davenport, I believe I should prefer to do it myself." As he turned, laughing, and helped her down, she added, "You said, the other day, in speaking of your clients, that nearly everything is of importance to some-

The Pride of Tellfair

body. I believe it would please Mrs. Shipman to know that I had locked that door personally, as you promised her I should."

"I agree with you," he answered.

She climbed the steps and disappeared in the dark recess of the rose-smothered porch. A moment later, though, her voice floated back in perplexity. "Mr. Davenport, I can't do it, after all. The key seems to stick."

Davenport looped a line over the hitching-post and ran up the long flight of steps in a manner to make an onlooker with a weak heart gasp.

"Why, it's already locked!" he said, twisting the key back and forth.

"*I* didn't do it!" declared Josephine. "The key wouldn't budge for me."

"Then Mother Shipman locked it herself."

"And forgot it! The dear old soul! We must never tell."

X

WHEN Bertha Congreve came upon Davenport and Josephine Priestley kneeling together before old Mrs. Shipman, jealousy gripped her heart like an iron hand. Tingling with fury, she recklessly showed Miss Priestley her insolent face, and then turned haughtily away. But she at once stole to the rear of the unconscious couple, and from that moment, with a heart full of unholy emotions, watched them unblushingly. When they rode off in Davenport's runabout, her anger and misery were complete.

Such a conjurer is jealousy! All the sweets of the evening had turned to gall. The people around her, the music and talk and laughter, were hateful to her eyes and ears. Yet she would not go home. The mere thought of her room was repulsive. In her present mood she knew it would prove a torture-chamber. The reality was preferable to her heated imaginings.

When Davenport and Josephine returned, in a surprisingly short time, she felt relieved, and a little ashamed of her hasty conclusions. Nevertheless, during the rest of the evening her eyes never left them. She skulked as near as she dared, straining her ears for a chance word, and watching every smile, which the demon jealousy twisted into significance. Davenport was not with Josephine all the time, by any means, but they seemed to be continually meeting, always with something to say, always with an excuse for tarrying.

Bertha knew she was doing wrong in this espionage,

The Pride of Tellfair

and felt her self-respect oozing away; but, turning a deaf ear to conscience, she sullenly continued her pursuit until, with a guilty start, she heard Davenport's voice at her elbow. At the moment she was watching Miss Priestley instead of him.

"I've been scouring the grounds for you," said he, cheerfully. "I want you to meet Miss Priestley and her sister."

Bertha hated his cheerfulness at that moment. It seemed borrowed from Miss Priestley.

"I don't want to meet them," she answered, bluntly.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't."

"That is no reason at all. What has put such nonsense into your head?"

"Thank you for your compliment," said she, ironically.

Davenport scanned her sharply and unfavorably. A suspicion of the truth crossed his mind, but he was loath to believe her guilty of a jealousy which was nothing less than insane.

"If it isn't nonsense, what is it?" he asked, with a mildness he was far from feeling.

"I don't feel like it. I don't feel like talking to a stranger just now," said she, lamely. "I have been out of sorts all evening."

"What shall I say to Miss Priestley?"

"Say what you please!" she blazed out, in uncontrollable wrath. "You have had no difficulty all evening in finding something to say to her."

The cat was out of the bag in a single bound. Davenport's first impulse was to turn on his heel; but his self-control was good, and he saw that she was suffering. Moreover, he knew that he had been very attentive to Josephine. Possibly he had neglected Bertha.

"I won't tell her anything," he answered, quietly. "I

The Pride of Tellfair

won't go back to her. She may think it a little strange, but she'll never divine the truth—it's too grotesque. We'll go home now, if you say so." She had come with him.

Bertha assented silently, and they slipped away to his horse. She did not live three blocks away, but Davenport always had a horse about. He did not take her directly home, but drove out into the country a little way, between the sleeping fields. Why, he could not have said, for he was in no mood to protract a ride with her just then. Perhaps he desired time to make peace. No word of love had ever passed his lips to her, no overt act had implied it. Yet a situation had grown up which vaguely disturbed him at times. Bertha expected him to call with a certain regularity. If an entertainment were on, she looked for his company as a matter of course. At social affairs they were paired off as naturally as if tagged with duplicate numbers. Other young men avoided marked attentions to Bertha; and Davenport, through sheer indifference, paid little attention to other young women.

This situation sprang in part from Bertha's position in his office, in part from his intimacy with the family, and in part, he had to admit, from weaknesses like the one he was guilty of at this moment—driving her around to humor her when he felt like taking her straight home, without ceremony. He palliated his weakness with the thought that he was moved by kindness—which was true; yet he knew that in this direction lay danger.

He said something about the beautiful night—which had lost all its beauty for him. Bertha neither answered nor looked up. Next he said something about the sociable. She was still silent. To force her to speak he asked about some office work. She answered with monosyllabic brevity. After that he talked at random, intent only to avoid the subject in both their minds. She

The Pride of Tellfair

made no attempt to bring him to it, but when he soon faced his horse homeward she gave him a steady, frigid look, which he felt without turning. It plainly said that she understood his anxiety to leave her.

She did not speak until nearly home; then she said, suddenly, and with considerable feeling: "I am sorry for what has happened to-night. I feel that I have acted beneath myself, and that I have forfeited your respect. I was so rude to Miss Priestley once this evening, and she will think it very strange that you did not bring me back to be introduced." She buried her face in her hands.

"How were you rude to Miss Priestley?" he asked.

She told him, and he was silent for a moment.

"Don't think any more about it," said he, finally. "Probably she won't, and I know I sha'n't."

"Oh yes, you will," she said, instantly. "Those things are not forgotten so readily. And I shouldn't care much for a man who could forget them easily."

He helped her down, she gave him a brief good-night, and passed swiftly into the house.

Her frank repentance had rather touched him. But at the same moment his mind reverted to the scene at the sociable. Boundless possibilities of misery were locked up in a temperament like Bertha's, he reflected. Like an evil genie in a leaden casket, they might never escape. But woe to the man who loosed them!

XI

HARVEY CONGREVE, anxious to give Bertha every advantage, consented, reluctantly, to her taking lessons at Davenport's expense. He also stipulated secrecy as to Davenport's agency. Mrs. Congreve broached the subject to her daughter the morning after the sociable. Bertha had forgiven Miss Priestley by this time, but she was by no means ready to court her friendship. The thought of taking instruction from her was distasteful. Indeed, she could not even think of meeting her without a flush of shame.

"We can't afford it," she answered at once. They were clearing the breakfast-table at the time.

"We *will* afford it," said Volley, generously. "It will be money well spent in the long run. A girl can't have too many accomplishments nowadays. Once, if she could cook and sew, she was all right; but that day is past."

Bertha gathered up the knives and forks thoughtfully.

"I don't know that I care to take lessons," she answered, finally.

"Why don't you?" asked Volley, surprised.

"I haven't time, for one thing."

"Bosh! You won't have to practise more than an hour a day, if that, and Morris will let you off twice a week to take your lesson."

"*Twice a week!*" exclaimed Bertha. "Mamma, you know we can't afford two lessons a week, even if we can one."

The Pride of Tellfair

"It will be just as cheap in the end. You won't have to take them so long," replied the ready Volley.

"How do you know Morris will let me off?"

"He said so."

"When?"

"When we were talking it over the other day."

"How did you happen to be talking it over with him?"

"How do we happen to talk everything over with him?" retorted Volley.

"What else did he say?"

"He said that you had a beautiful soprano voice that ought to be cultivated, and that he thought Miss Priestley would prove a capital teacher."

The addition about Miss Priestley was unfortunate, and toppled the compliment over.

"I should like to know what he knows about her teaching," returned Bertha, caustically.

"I don't think she is a woman to pretend to a knowledge she doesn't possess," said Volley, virtuously.

"What do *you* know about her?" retorted Bertha, with a short, derisive laugh.

"I had a talk with her about prices and other things, and I profess to be something of a judge of human nature."

"You were quiet enough about your talk."

"I didn't want to say anything until I knew what we should do. Harvey and I did not decide until last night to let you take lessons." It was certainly true that Harvey had not.

Bertha was silent again, and her mother judiciously bided her time.

"It's very good of you and papa, but I'd rather not take them just now. Maybe I shall in the fall."

"Very well," answered Volley, stiffly. "You are the judge. But I'll tell you this—I shouldn't have thrown away such a chance when *I* was a girl."

The Pride of Tellfair

Bertha did not answer, but before she left the house she stepped into her father's study.

"Papa, I am ever so grateful to you for offering to give me music lessons, because I know what sacrifices it would cost you. But if it won't hurt your feelings, I'd rather not begin just now. I'm very busy in the office, and the hot weather is coming on, and—I'd sooner not begin, if you don't care."

The shoe of dissimulation was already pinching Harvey's tender toes, just as he had foreseen it would. He therefore, unlike Volley, tried to slip it off.

"That's all right, my dear. We want you to do just as you please about it. And don't emphasize our sacrifices too much—not as long as your wages go into the family exchequer."

Volley renewed her attack that night, and after going over her arguments of the morning, and several others besides, she added, casually, as if it were an after-thought:

"One reason why I wanted you to take lessons was because Morris suggested it. He has been our friend through thick and thin. All the favors have come from his side. I know it would please him for you to do it. I would like to make some return in that way, little as it is."

"I don't see how that would be any return," answered Bertha.

"Well, it would round you off, give you an extra accomplishment, fit you better for society."

"But what's that to him?"

"Don't you see how it could be something to him—possibly—some day—under certain circumstances?"

It does not take much, at times, to send a girl's thoughts marriageward—just a velvety tone, a drooping of the lids, coupled with an innocent word or two. Bertha started a little, glanced at her mother's face, and

The Pride of Tellfair

then her pure, white skin was suffused with blood. She said nothing—indeed, could not—and even the daring mother ventured no farther along that sacredly private path. But she added, with the same subtle suavity:

“I think it would please Morris, too, because the Priestleys are clients of his.”

Again she overstepped. The revulsion in Bertha was instantaneous.

“That’s the whole secret of his solicitude for me,” she burst out, scornfully.

Volley eyed her daughter with complacent, almost contemptuous superiority.

“I am surprised,” was all she said, but it conveyed volumes.

“I know Morris about as well as you do, mamma—perhaps a little better,” answered Bertha, in a voice trembling with resentment, “and I’ll not be his tool for you or anybody else.”

Volley gave a short, scornful laugh; then, with a shifty, dishonest gleam in her eyes, indicative of a daring resolve, she said:

“Just to show you that you don’t know what you say, I’m going to tell you something. But I want your word first that you will keep it to yourself. I don’t want you to tell even Harvey that you know it.”

Bertha’s silence gave consent, and her mother added, swiftly, “Morris offered to pay for your lessons himself!”

Bertha heard the intelligence without outward emotion. She was yet suspicious.

“Well, what have you to say?” demanded Volley.

“I am grateful, of course. But I still believe he wants to favor Miss Priestley as much as he does me.”

This was too much for Volley.

“Bert, you know as much about a man as a new-born babe does,” she exclaimed, wrathfully. “And you

The Pride of Tellfair

can handle one just about as well. You will know more before you are as old as I am. You can do just as you please about this business, now. If you want to let a little petty jealousy—it's nothing else—cut you off from a chance to improve yourself, and pose as an ingrate, all right. I sha'n't say another word. It is you, not I, who will suffer."

"Oh, I intend to accept his offer," said Bertha, in a hard little voice.

"Do just as you please," repeated Volley, and left the room.

But she knew the battle was won. That last big gun had done the work. The discharge had blackened her a little, for she recognized the betrayal of Davenport's trust as an ugly thing. But she assured her conscience that it was suffering in a good cause.

The report of that same big gun was destined to be heard far beyond the battle-field, and to come rolling back in echoes long after it seemed to have been lost in space. For the secret proved an embarrassing possession to Bertha. It practically barred conversation with her father about her lessons, and also with Davenport. When either her father or Morris chanced to touch on the subject, she at once became uneasy, until at last the long-coveted lessons promised to prove little more than a humiliation and a corrupter of her integrity.

As an instance, although the connection may be a little difficult to see, Davenport had dictated a letter to a law firm in Peoria, asking for certain documents to be offered as evidence in an impending suit. As the day for the trial drew near and no documents came to hand, he grew restless; but thinking each day that the next mail must surely bring them, he deferred any further action in the matter.

One morning, while dusting her desk, before Davenport had appeared, Bertha uncovered a letter stamped,

The Pride of Tellfair

sealed, and addressed, ready for the post-office. It was the letter to Peoria. For a moment her heart stood still. The uncanceled, bright-red stamp stood out like an accusing spot of blood, coloring the visions of disaster which instantaneously swept through her mind.

At the same moment she heard Davenport's step on the stairs. Time was when she would have thrown herself unhesitatingly on his generosity and confessed her oversight; but of late, since the music matter, a barrier had reared itself between them. Seized with a guilty panic, therefore, she crushed the letter into her bosom, and awaited his coming, panting.

"Have those papers come?" were his first words.

"No," she answered, unsteadily.

He did not look at her, fortunately, after the first glance, but, with his hands in his pockets and his frowning eyes on the floor, entered the inner office. Bertha sat outside in an agony of doubt and remorse. He, her trusting employer, was waiting anxiously for an answer to a letter which lay in her bosom. As the precious moments slipped by, and her burden of guilt grew heavier, it seemed as if she must cry out under the cruel pain. Yet it seemed physically impossible for her to arise and go into the other room and acknowledge her guilt. If she had only told him when he first came in! Then it would have been only to confess an oversight; now it would be to confess a lie as well.

"Bertha," said Davenport, re-entering the office, "I think we had better telegraph for those papers.. What do you say? My letter may possibly have gone astray."

"I would do it," said she, almost eagerly. "It can't do any harm, and I wouldn't take any further chances."

"I have already taken a big one, for, if they haven't started the papers, I doubt if they can get them here in time now. If it comes to the worst, I'll have a certified copy made by telephone. It will cost money,

The Pride of Tellfair

and old Horton might refuse to accept such a copy as evidence, but it's the best we can do if the others fail."

He left for the telegraph-office. Bertha felt easier now that there was a prospect of averting the consequences of her mistake. But she soon realized that the arrival of the papers had nothing to do with *her* case, vital as it was to Davenport's. All the rest of the day, and far into the night, her guilty secret charged back and forth through her conscience like a loose gun-carriage on a pitching man-of-war, wrecking all in its path and threatening the final destruction of the ship itself.

Wan from loss of sleep and weary of the conflict within, she surrendered the next morning, and entered Davenport's private room with a bloodless face.

"Morris, I have something to tell you. I—I found that letter to Peoria on my desk yesterday morning. It had got covered up in some way. I—I am terribly sorry."

Davenport, puzzled by her excessive emotion, looked at her thoughtfully for a moment.

"You found it yesterday morning?"

She nodded with twitching lips and began to cry. His question was evidently to make sure that she had been deceiving him for twenty-four hours.

"I am sorry you didn't tell me sooner," he said, gravely and kindly. "I should have made my telegram more explicit yesterday. You have evidently been suffering over this. I am sorry that fear of my displeasure should have driven you to deception. I don't want you to feel that way towards me. We all make mistakes. We can't help it. It is only when we attempt to cover them up that we are doing something we can help, and something really deserving censure."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Can you forgive me—and trust me again?" she asked, thickly, through tears and handkerchief.

"Yes."

"If I could only tell you how I have suffered—how guilty I have felt! I have scarcely eaten since yesterday morning, and I couldn't sleep last night."

"I know what a guilty conscience is. We all do. You are not the first to suffer from it, so don't condemn yourself too severely. If it teaches you never to yield again to deception, the lesson is cheap."

"I never will!" said she, fervently.

And she certainly meant it.

XII

JOSEPHINE found Bertha an interesting pupil. Not on account of her voice, though. This was a thin, sweet, lyric soprano, fine spun as a thread of gossamer, floating out on the air with the tremulous tenuity and spirituality of a vesper-sparrow's song. It was, in fact, a voice for the evening hour, when the strife of day is hushed and baby lids begin to droop.

But there was no promise in such a voice from a teacher's point of view. It could never be developed so as to fill a public building of any size. Nor was there any special promise in the girl herself that Josephine could see. She seemed to be not only cold, but also shallow. Physically she was as delicate as a lily, but she at times betrayed a moral coarseness which fairly shocked Josephine. Yet she also had a way of exhibiting the most unexpected virtues, in a most unexpected way; and it was this trait which interested Josephine and kept her constantly revising her estimate of the girl's character.

She did not like Bertha at first, and she suspected that this feeling was reciprocated. Yet in time the edge of this dislike wore away in the teacher; and about the same time she discovered, naturally enough, a similar change in her pupil. In fact, she believed that Bertha was beginning to admire her a little. This admiration was manifested in a number of ways, but primarily in Bertha's copying her teacher's manner, style, and even dress.

The Pride of Tellfair

Josephine occasionally wore her hair, especially about the house, in a heavy ball upon the back of her neck. With a low-cut waist the glossy black knot stood out on the white, velvety slope like a fluted sphere of ebony. In another woman the effect might have been mere amorousness; but in Josephine the coiffure, seemingly by its weight, gave her strong, square head a Juno poise which was truly admirable—as the young lady herself doubtless suspected.

Bertha adopted this hair-dressing cautiously and by degrees, but at last she too had a full-fledged ball upon the back of her slim, arched neck. Unlike her model, though, she wore it everywhere—in the office, on the street, and at church. But the last place to which she introduced it was Josephine's music-room. Her hair was hardly thick enough nor of the right color to give the statuesque effect which Josephine secured; but it did very well, and Josephine, always making overtures of friendship to her whimsical pupil, ventured to compliment her one day on her new coiffure.

"It isn't exactly new," said Bertha, coolly. "I usually wear my hair this way in the summer-time."

For reasons of her own, Josephine suspected that this was a lie. Yet she was half ashamed of the suspicion when the girl's flutelike voice stole forth a moment later like a lost strain of angel-music. The truth was, Josephine had not yet had a chance to study the contrasts offered by Harvey Congreve and his wife, or she might have better understood the contrasts offered by their child. It was not long, though, before she got a peep into the Congreve household.

"Miss Priestley, mamma and I would be glad to have you and your sister take tea with us to-morrow evening," said Bertha, after her lesson one day.

"Thank you, we shall be glad to come—Bertha,"

The Pride of Tellfair

answered Josephine, venturing for the first time to address the girl by her given name.

Mrs. Congreve had suggested that Morris Davenport also be asked in for that evening, but Bertha had promptly vetoed this.

"Why not?" asked Volley.

"Because I don't want him."

"Oh, very well," said Volley, sweetly. She understood, and a knowing, half-derisive light leaked out from under her lazy, long-lashed lids. "He'd help in entertaining, if Harvey should happen to have the dumps."

Harvey did not happen to have the dumps. He was in prime spirits, in fact. After tea he insisted on the guests seeing his study, and when Mrs. Congreve had gone ahead and lighted a lamp, he sent his wheeled chair caracoling along in advance of the party in a way pathetically suggestive of the gambolling of a boy. The room was in true student's disorder, littered with papers and books, and scented with tobacco. What space was not occupied by book-cases was given over to potted plants, and in a bay-window a huge sword-fern hung from the ceiling.

"Here is where *I* live," said Harvey, gayly. "A library has one great advantage over all other luxuries. If your wheel of fortune happens to take a turn, as mine did, you can't sell your books for much, if anything—especially in a town like Tellfair—and you can therefore keep them without hurting your conscience or perplexing your neighbors over how you make both ends meet. Now if I kept a horse worth one-hundredth part of what I paid for these books, this town would be in a state of unrest over my extravagance."

Josephine wondered how Mrs. Congreve, who looked far from poverty-stricken, in a rough, gray gown of faultless fit, relished these reflections. But she seemed

The Pride of Tellfair

quite as philosophical as her husband, and said to Josephine, in a matter-of-fact tone, "If you like books, Miss Priestley, you and Mr. Congreve will be friends."

"I love them. We have a large library of our own—and for much the same reason," she added, with a smile.

When they returned to the sitting-room, Victoria played on the piano and Josephine sang. The latter had a rich contralto, which old D'Artaquette, her teacher, used ecstatically to liken to the dim, vaulted space of Notre Dame shaken with the sobbing of the organ. As she now sang a weird German folk-song, Harvey Congreve's eye grew bright with moisture, for he was womanishly sensitive to such things. His wife's gray orbs were inscrutable, as usual. Yet as they stole from her husband's rapt face to the strong, young figure at the piano, they glowed with a subtle hostility. Volley's gods were Youth and Beauty, but only as embodied in herself. She had beauty, and she had retained her youth in a manner truly remarkable. She was no more of a songster than a crow, it is true; but it was not envy of Josephine's voice which now lay over her face like a gray veil. Rather it was envy of a purity and spirituality which she had never possessed; or, if she had, she had long since worn it away by her ambitious, restless, selfish life.

It was nine o'clock or after, and Victoria was telegraphing with her eyes to Josephine that it was time to go, when a heavy step sounded in the hall, without warning of bell, a hat was clapped audibly upon the hall-tree, and a burly figure next loomed in the shadows beyond the doorway.

"Excuse *me!*" the gentleman exclaimed, in a voice which would have been effective at a hundred yards, and halted at sight of the visitors. "Didn't know you had company, Harvey."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Come in, Bradley," said Congreve.

Hayford—for it was he—carried a funnel-shaped parcel which strongly suggested flowers, in the half-light in which Josephine saw it; and he flourished this as he made an exaggerated bow of apology. Mrs. Congreve instantly arose and crossed the room with serpentine grace and swiftness; and before Mr. Hayford could possibly come in she had placed herself squarely, though most naturally, between him and the door.

"Let me take your hat, Bradley," said she, audibly to all.

— Josephine was quite sure that he had no hat to take, both having heard him hang it up and having seen his hands, empty save for the parcel. Nevertheless, Volley hovered in front of him for an instant, and then lithely slipped aside. And, lo! when he stood again revealed, after his brief eclipse, the funnel-shaped parcel had vanished, to be seen no more by either of the Priestleys. Mrs. Congreve reappeared an instant later, bland and smiling.

Hayford was a man of herculean mould, yet of astonishing grace and lightness on his feet. Josephine learned later, to her amazement, that he had acquired the latter in the prize-ring. Not over forty, his short hair was sprinkled with gray. At first glance, it would have been easy to mistake him for a philanthropist, for he had a soft, blue eye and a large and easy presence. But once he spoke, he was just a commonplace, loud-voiced horse-trader, whom Nature, for reasons of her own, had seen fit to dress in the flesh of a god.

He was a ready talker, and not in the least embarrassed by the presence of two strange young women. His mind, though, worked in a microscopic circle, and in the centre of this circle was a horse. Whether the talk ran to the President of the United States, or Tim Hollenbeck, the village ne'er-do-well, or music, or his-

The Pride of Tellfair

tory, Bradley, sooner or later — generally sooner — brought it back to horses; and, once he got it there, it was no easy matter to wrest it from him again. And, as a matter of fact, he did, by his sincerity, capture the interest of the company.

After a little, though, Josephine began to suspect that Mr. Congreve was slyly egging Hayford on. Harvey had, in fact, himself started the equine discussion by informing the girls that Mr. Hayford was the proprietor of a livery-stable—one of the best-equipped, so far as blooded stock went, in the northern part of the State.

"They've got a better one in Rockford," said Bradley, modestly.

"How many horses have you now?" inquired Congreve.

"Twenty-three—including them two ponies I bought of Ryerson. I got stuck on them. I'd swap 'em for jack-rabbits now."

"You must go through his stable some day, young ladies, if you like horses. It's well worth a visit."

"If she's been riding behind Morris Davenport's horses," said Hayford, looking at Josephine, "she won't see much in my bunch to admire. I missed a chance to-day to get a good common horse. You remember that crinkly tailed, round-bellied black mare of Rossiter's, Harvey? Was out on Hagley's place all winter, and snagged her foot on a barb-wire fence. Bud Smith bought her to-day. Paid a hundred and three-quarters. Too much. I offered one and a half."

Bud Smith had bought the mare, it came out, to use in his delivery-wagon. This turned the conversation to Bud's new grocery-store, and then to stores in general; but long before this Hayford had dropped out. Then came a lull.

"Doc Sanderson got kicked this afternoon by Hartley's

The Pride of Tellfair

iron-gray," observed Bradley. Sanderson was a horse-doctor. "Broke his hip, I understand."

"Sanderson is a most unfortunate man," said Congreve, and went on at some length to cite instances, ending by telling how Sanderson had lost his first wife. Another lull.

"I guess the gray will die," said Bradley, cheerfully. "Hartley sent over to Marysville for a veter'nary this afternoon. The trouble with Hartley is he don't feed right."

Josephine had an insane desire to laugh. To overcome the dangerous tendency, she remarked that she thought the country around Tellfair must be a good one for raising horses—so many people in Tellfair were fanciers.

"First-class plugs are scarce, though," observed Hayford, gloomily.

He gallantly escorted the girls home when they left, and expressed his regret that he had no horse there to draw them. That human legs were made for locomotion was a fact not readily accepted by him, and he regarded the young ladies' assurance that they would just as soon walk as merely a polite fiction.

It was not until she had gone to bed that Josephine remembered that this was the man who held the mortgage on her home. She was very glad, then, that she had not laughed.

Josephine was not the only one who suspected Congreve of complicity in Hayford's exceeding and even unusual horsiness. Mrs. Congreve had sat for some moments with an ominous fire smoldering in her eyes. After the visitors had gone this fire blazed up fiercely.

"If I were you, Harvey," said she, angrily, "I wouldn't attempt to make one of the few friends who had stuck to me through my adversity ridiculous in the eyes of strangers."

The Pride of Tellfair

"What did I do?" he asked, in surprise.

"Don't you know?" she demanded. "Didn't you keep Bradley on horseback all evening, while I was doing my best to pull him off, and not let him make a fool of himself before those girls, and bore them with his hobby?"

"I merely let him strike his gait," said Harvey. "I don't think he bored the girls."

"No, I think you fancied they were getting a good deal of fun out of him," she retorted, "and you saw to it that the sport didn't flag. Do you suppose that those young women would suspect from your conduct that that man was a time-tried friend of yours and mine? No. They had every reason to believe him a buffoon whom you had invited in for their entertainment. Good-night."

The parting words were not a concession to affection or even domestic decency, but an implication that he could get to bed that night alone. This he could do on a pinch. He did not go at once, however, but wheeled into the study, where a lamp was still burning, and took up a book—his usual harbor in time of storm. But he was too much disturbed this time to read. Perhaps he felt a little guilty, too, on reflection; and he searched his heart for any hidden motive for making Bradley Hayford ridiculous. He asked himself, point-blank, if he were jealous of Hayford; and he answered, point-blank, that he was not.

Hayford had been kind to him, as Volley said, and he hoped he was not ungrateful. But he and Hayford had nothing in common. Two men wider apart could hardly have been found. Hayford often unwittingly offended Congreve's finer senses by his native coarseness, and it was not unnatural that dislike should occasionally stir in Congreve's heart.

Bertha, as usual, had taken no part in the family

The Pride of Tellfair

jar. A few minutes later she entered the study and kissed her father good-night, with more than usual fervor.

"I have turned your bed down, papa," said she, "and laid out your gown."

He retained her in his arms a moment.

"Do you think I made Bradley ridiculous to-night, my dear?" he asked.

"He doesn't need anybody to make him ridiculous."

"Do you think the young ladies thought I was trying to make him so?"

"I don't believe they did. I didn't. Mamma is too sensitive about Bradley."

He winced a little under the last, and let her go. When she re-entered her bedroom—she and her mother slept together—Volley was just unwrapping a cluster of gorgeous red roses. She sniffed at them critically once or twice, and then coolly, wantonly, tossed them into a corner.

"I don't think papa would do *that*," remarked Bertha, significantly.

Volley, deigning no answer, moodily undressed, and it was not until she was combing her splendid hair that she said, spitefully, "Bradley talked like a donkey to-night."

"I thought he talked like a horse," said Bertha, with a little, short laugh. She seldom tried a witticism, and never unless the flight was short and sure. "I don't see what you admire about that man, mamma."

"Admire!" cried Volley, wrathfully. "Who said I admired him? Isn't he my cousin? Because I open my house to him, and ride behind his horses occasionally, and defend him against those who would make him ridiculous, am I an admirer of his?"

Bertha wisely held her tongue, and got down on her knees and began to gather up the roses, smelling them

The Pride of Tellfair

one by one. She loved flowers, and her mother did not. Volley watched her curiously, and finally asked, ironically but conciliatingly:

"Do they all smell different? You try each one."

"No, all alike, and all like horse," answered Bertha. But it was all in good fun, and Volley herself laughed.

XIII

OLD-SETTLERS' DAY broke as crystal clear as a fairy bubble blown from a drop of dew. A fluttering breeze came playing out of the northeast, and a few fleecy cloud-streamers hung in the sky to gladden many an anxious weather-eye squinted heavenward that morning throughout the county.

Old Benny Wickwire, tottering along on his three legs, was the first person to appear in the court-house square, where a canopied platform and plank seats had been erected the day before. Selecting a good position, with reference to shade, view, etc., the old man backed up to the seat, grasped his knotted stick with both his knotted hands, doubled his rheumatic old body together like a rusty jackknife, with many a twinge and crack of joint and groan, and then carefully let himself down.

He was now ready for the exercises, which would begin some four hours later; and, after lighting his clay pipe, he cocked his watery eyes towards the fresh morning sun to ascertain the time of day. As he did so the Presbyterian clock struck six. He calculated that it was about fifteen minutes slow, and said so to himself, aloud, and resolved to tell the sexton of the church, whom he did not like.

He spent the next two hours in smoking, and in wondering whether he had chosen the best seat, after all, and in formulating his strictures on the Presbyterian clock. Then the second Old Settler appeared—

The Pride of Tellfair

Malachi Bell. He was fully fifteen years older than Benny, and looked fully fifteen years younger. He strode briskly down the gravelled walk—with a cane, to be sure, but swinging it as airily as a drum-major's baton—nodded carelessly at Wickwire, actively mounted the steps to the platform, critically noted the arrangement of chairs there, moved one or two an inch or so, and then sat down, experimentally, as if facing an audience. Clearly he was one in authority. Benny, behind a cloud of smoke, like a squid in his ink, eyed him greenly.

The third Old Settler soon followed, and then they came in twos and threes. Teams from the country began to fill the hitching-rack around the square. The train from the west brought in a company of twenty or so, and the train from the east as many more. By ten o'clock the square was well filled—not with Old Settlers alone, for these were comparatively few in number, but citizens, mothers with babes, young women in holiday finery, a few young men, and children. The big flag on the court-house was riding blithely on the breeze. The band had galloped through one or two slashing airs. A pop-corn wagon and two lemonade stands were driving a brisk trade. Committee-men were distributing badges to identify the Old Settlers and designate the number of years each had lived in the county.

Dinner was already under way, for many had breakfasted at daybreak and would be more than hungry by early noon. Two tables of vast length, resembling bowling-alleys, made two sides of a square. In the angle formed, the Woman's Relief Corps, which was to serve the dinner, had established its commissary. Here the fair volunteers, all in white aprons, swarmed like bees, plying knives and can-openers, making sandwiches, slicing cold meats, carving chickens, cutting cakes and pies, opening sardines and salmon, tying col-

The Pride of Tellfair

ored threads of identification to borrowed silverware, chattering like magpies, laughing, shrieking, jostling, crossing and recrossing, ordering and counter-ordering, yet doing a vast amount of work withal.

After the greetings were over, the old men naturally fell apart in little groups. Here they fought over the Civil War—many, if not most of them, wore G. A. R. buttons—speculated on crops and politics, disputed as to whether Coon Creek was bridged in '41 or not, discussed the distance by the old corduroy road from Herkimer's to the grist-mill, and settled the year, month, and day on which Sam and Jennie Small bought the first kerosene-lamp ever seen in the county.

Some of the gayer ones boastfully held out their palsied hands to prove the steadiness of their nerves, or strained their eyes to show that they could read without glasses. Elbridge Smith, aged eighty, cut a pigeon-wing on the pavement in front of the court-house steps, and ended by leaping in the air—fully two inches—and attempting to knock his heels together, which little vanity cost him a lame back the rest of the day.

In this same group, seated on the steps, was a slender man in army blue—unquestionably a veteran. There was a fixed smile on his patrician face and his eyes were rather glassy; but it did not occur to Josephine, until Davenport told her, that the man was tipsy.

"I must tell you about him," said Davenport. "His name is Henry Drake. At one time his family and three others practically owned this county. The house Mrs. Shipman lives in now is the old Drake homestead, and in that day was considered a palace. Henry's father deeded this ground to the county to be used for a court-house site. At one time Henry was considered the most eligible young man in the county. He was a fine-looking fellow, a good dancer, rich, and a graduate of Harvard. When he marched bravely off to

The Pride of Tellfair

war in his captain's uniform, I have heard Mrs. Shipman say half a dozen girls cried, and mothers pointed him out to their boys as the perfection of manhood.

"Camp-life ruined him. He came back debauched, a slave to drink, and with an unconquerable repugnance to work. Of course, he went rapidly from bad to worse. Society held on to him for a long time, for the sake of what he had been; but as his family died off and his fortune oozed away, he slowly sank lower and lower. To-day he lives, rent free, in a basement under one of the stores he used to own, cooking, eating, and sleeping in a single room. His highest ambition is to work somebody for a drink. He might have been a venerable old man, honored by the community, and the head of a large and useful family. As it is, he has no wife, no child, no one to soothe him when he's sick, no one to hold his hand when he dies. Look at that smile, though! He's a gentleman to the bone, and to-day would give his last dime to any one who needed it more than himself. And yet he will be forgotten before he has been dead a month."

A mist of pity filled Josephine's eyes. When Davenport whimsically offered to introduce her to Henry, she shook her head.

"I couldn't make sport of the poor old man," said she.

"Then I'll introduce you to some one else—the king of these grayheads, the oldest of them all, a man who in two years, if he lives, will write his age in three figures."

From this preface Josephine looked for a mere shell of a man, a hoary human cocoon. To her amazement the king proved a ruddy-faced, roly-poly old fellow perched on a bench, from which he swung his fat legs like a school-boy. He was cackling mirthfully over a story which some youth of sixty or seventy had just

The Pride of Tellfair

told. He looked as pugnacious as a cock-sparrow, and his shaggy beaver hat of ancient mould stood up as pertly as a topknot.

"Uncle Billy, I want you to meet a young lady who has recently come to Tellfair to live." When Uncle Billy had gallantly scrambled to the ground, Davenport continued: "Miss Priestley, this is Uncle Billy Manderson. He was ninety-eight years old last March, and he drove to town this morning alone—nine miles. He has been a member of the Methodist Church for a trifle over ninety years, and says that he is beginning to feel perfectly at home there."

Throughout this presentation Billy blinked his little, weak, blue eyes smilingly—yet shrewdly, too, Josephine fancied, as if he penetrated Davenport's flattery. He was undoubtedly childish, though. He laughed and crowed over trivial things which had happened seventy-five or eighty years before; he went off like a bunch of fire-crackers when Davenport maliciously referred to some farmer who had once shot one of Billy's trespassing pigs; and later he alluded to Lincoln's assassination as though it had happened the year before.

At eleven o'clock the Association was convened for a brief session before dinner. The members slowly filled the seats reserved for them immediately in front of the stand. Old, purblind, and uncertain were they—bent, gray, and palsied—frail, shrunken, and stiff—a harvest to make Death's mouth water. Yet some were straight and robust, and a few were gay and sprightly, like Malachi Bell and Uncle Billy Manderson—and these among the oldest.

On the end of the first row sat a man who drew Josephine's eyes almost against her will. So ancient, hoary, and mummified was he that he might have been tomb-keeper to the Pharaohs. His silk tile hung on his fleshless skull like an inverted bucket on a post,

The Pride of Tellfair

dropping down over his ears and all but over his eyes. His long, black coat, many sizes too big, puckered in a thousand wrinkles; and its collar, standing out from his shrunk neck, touched the brim of his hat behind. A scarerow would have had more shape and stability, and he seemed ready to collapse at any moment. Yet he sat through it all, motionless, like some strange, uncanny, sick bird, with its head and neck buried in its feathers, only its beak—his hooked nose—sticking out, and the sinister, unwinking eyes behind.

The pioneer army of which these men were the last company had invaded Tellfair County when it was well-nigh a primeval waste. Only a few French trappers had been before them. Nature reigned supreme. No human hand had disturbed the rich, black soil and turned it up to be kissed by the sun. The sand-hill crane winged its low, labored flight over an uncharted sea of prairie grass. The red-skinned children of the land came and went along their narrow trails, or reared beside some stream their villages of a day. The wolf skulked from grove to grove in its ceaseless race with Cold, Hunger and Death.

The pioneer brought with him the tools and knowledge of civilization; but the fight, after all, was not unlike the fight which Adam made with Earth when driven out of Eden. This new Adam burned off the ten-foot prairie grass, ploughed and sowed, and sometimes reaped; built houses, bridged streams, made roads. His Eve spun and wove and cut and sewed, and failed not to be fruitful. Both, meanwhile, were pinched often with cold and hunger, and frequently pierced with arrows. At the end of the year they had what the crane, the wolf, and the Indian had—food, none too much, and shelter, none too good.

Yet each year there was a little more food, a little better shelter, and more time to think and pray and

The Pride of Tellfair

play. School-houses and meeting-houses sprang up. Then, as if by magic, villages and towns. Wagon roads gridironed the county; and one day an iron dragon, breathing smoke and fire, shrieked across the prairie, dragging its freighted tail behind.

Then it was that the ball of Progress which the fathers had so laboriously set in motion at first, and had so laboriously been pushing since, suddenly ceased to resist; yea, left their hands—of its own momentum, apparently—and spun swiftly ahead. The fathers rubbed their eyes and saw that their children, grown in a night, as it were, had taken the ball from their hands, and were driving it at a speed which they could not hope to emulate. But it was only because the children were using steam and electricity, organization and education.

Even so, it pained the fathers a little at first. But their ambition had mercifully oozed away with their youth and strength, and they did not grieve long. They were content that their children should be richer, gentler, and finer than they themselves had been. Yet in some ways the old days seemed the best, and they liked to get together, as now, and talk them over.

Roll-call proceeded slowly, because the secretary's voice was weak and the members' ears were dull. Eight or ten failed to respond, and three or four of these would respond no more to any earthly summons. Brief obituaries of the latter were read, the old men bending forward, with hands behind their ears, straining to hear. Were they thinking of the early day when the Association would be listening thus to *their* obituaries? Then officers were elected for the ensuing year. Emory Spencer was re-elected to the presidency for the tenth consecutive term, and in response lisped through a speech which could not have been audible at a dozen yards. Then the session adjourned until after dinner.

As the church clock tolled twelve, two men staggered

The Pride of Tellfair

across the street from Mrs. Shipman's with a steaming wash-boiler between them. It contained coffee, the only hot thing served at dinner. The tables, already laden with good things, were quickly filled, although there was plenty of room left for late-comers—some of the business men and clerks. Sticks, crutches, and invalid-chairs were stowed near or behind the aged owners by the watchful ladies, and then Mrs. Herbert, president of the Relief Corps, gave the Baptist minister a signal. He arose and said grace in a voice audible to all.

"Now I think *we* can be seated," said Davenport to Josephine. "There are two empty places across from Malachi Bell, and you will have a good chance to learn the secret of his marvellously prolonged vitality. I'll tell you in advance that one of his maxims is that you can't have steam without fuel."

"Oh, I am not going to eat here!" said Josephine. "Victoria will be waiting for me at home. I should have gone before to help her, if I had known how late it was."

"She doesn't seem to need much help at this moment," replied Davenport, nodding towards the other end of the table.

There, sure enough, sat Victoria, with half a dozen other young women, as much at home as if she had founded the Old Settlers' Association.

"Why, we don't belong to the society," said Josephine, blushing for Victoria's audacity.

"You are a citizen of Tellfair, aren't you?"

"I suppose so."

"Then that entitles you to one free meal on Old Settlers' Day." And, half against her will, she was forced to sit down.

At one o'clock the meeting was reconvened, and reminiscences were in order. Davenport secured seats for himself and Josephine on the stage. Here were the

The Pride of Tellfair

speakers of the day, the band, and a number of prominent citizens. Old Billy Manderson—by virtue of his great age, perhaps—also occupied a seat here, and just in front of Josephine. He tapped his cane impatiently whenever the programme dragged or something was said which he did not like. Several times he shook his head vigorously, and once he called out, loudly, "I don't know about that!" just as he was in the habit of doing in church when he disagreed with the minister.

The reminiscences were not exciting. There was one old gentleman, though—tall, thin, white-haired, brown-eyed—whose laugh was so sweet, boyish, and contagious that Josephine loved him instantly. Others there were, too, who stirred her veneration to its fountain-head. And she listened with bated breath while Randolph Harrison told how his father and two brothers, lost on the prairie in a blizzard, had killed and disembowelled their horses and crept within them to keep from freezing—only to find the carcasses, not a refuge, but a grave.

But mostly the old men, as was natural, were trivial, repeating, and long-winded. Elbridge Smith took his audience to Chicago by ox-team, with a load of wheat, and threatened to be as long on the road as he was the first time, in the early forties. Ebenezer Kell occupied twenty minutes in telling how he used to bait a skunk-trap. Marcus Tully faced the crowd for ten minutes, and doubtless said something, for his lips moved, but no one heard what it was. Maurice Hurd read his speech, got his sheets of note-paper mixed, skipped some, read others twice—or oftener—dropped one, watched it flutter to the ground, waited in a cold sweat till a boy had restored it, and then sat down, overwhelmed by confusion.

The next speaker was Myron Rakestraw a tall, chalky, bloodless, iceberg sort of man.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I will make no speech to-day," said he, in cold, measured tones. "I will simply say, for the benefit of the young men and boys present, that I was eighty-eight years old yesterday, and that I feel as well as I did forty years ago. I attribute my health and longevity, first, to co-operating intelligently with nature; second, to the total abstinence from all forms of liquor and tobacco."

His reference to "co-operating with nature" provoked a smile in many quarters, for Rakestraw's weakness for patent medicines was notorious, and one of the rooms in his house was a veritable little drug-store.

"What's that, Brother Rakestraw?" asked old Billy Manderson, sharply, leaning forward with his hand behind his ear. "I didn't just ketch that part about tobacco."

"I said," repeated Rakestraw, slowly and distinctly, "that I attributed my health and longevity largely to total abstinence from liquor and tobacco."

"I don't know about that, Brother Rakestraw—I don't know about that," said Billy, blinking purblindly, shaking his head and smiling his most peppery smile. "I'm ninety-eight myself, ten years older than you be, and I've chewed tobacco since I was six."

A roar of laughter went up at this.

"I guess you didn't begin quite that young, Brother Manderson," answered Rakestraw, without the ghost of a smile.

"Yes, I did—yes, I did," blustered Billy. "I don't know but I was younger."

Another roar went up. Rakestraw, unmoved, waited for silence.

"I have no doubt you would be a great deal better off if you had left tobacco alone."

"Well, I don't know that my health has been anything to complain of," retorted Billy, with snapping

The Pride of Tellfair

eyes. "I don't know as it's been any worse than yours. If all I hear is true, you've swilled enough patent hog-wash in your time to float a ship."

"Medicine has its use," answered Rakestraw, calmly, his arctic blood impervious to anger. "I expect my health to be as good ten years from now as it is to-day, which is better than yours, I dare say, or any other man's who has chewed and spit his vitality away."

Billy's hot temper instantly boiled over at this reflection on his vigor, the pride of his life.

"Don't you worry about my spittin' my vitality away!" he shouted, flourishing his stick in warlike fashion. "I'm ten years older than you be, but I'll live yet to spit tobacco-juice on your grave. And, by gum, I'll do it, too!"

Rakestraw retired, amid a tempest of jeers and laughter, and Davenport pulled old Billy down by the coat-tails. He simmered and sputtered a moment, but ended with a loud, triumphant cackle.

Davenport followed the old men with a short, impromptu talk, and then came the "orator of the day"—Congressman Littlejohn, of Marysville. This gentleman was of the dressy, decorous type of politician, and his rural constituents fondly pictured him as cutting a swath of prodigious width in Washington society. Mr. Littlejohn was careful never to jar this illusion, and to-day his attire and deportment were faultless. He bowed with profound respect to the venerable president; turned, and gallantly saluted the ladies on the stage, and then, with finely graduated emotion, bent to the mixed crowd below. The audience was rather restless under his turgid oratory, but the Old Settlers listened respectfully, though not hearing more than half, perhaps, of what was said, and not understanding more than half of what was heard.

The gathering, already loosened around the edges, be-

The Pride of Tellfair

gan to break up as soon as he was through; but the stirring instantly ceased when Mrs. Shipman advanced, unaided, to the front of the platform. She waited a moment for quiet, with a smile on her face, and then began in her low, clear, penetrating voice:

"Mr. Spencer wants me to tell you, once more, how most of the land in Tellfair County first came into white hands, although I am not a bit proud of the part our color played in the transaction. I have often heard La Chance himself tell the story to my father, and can vouch for its truth.

"Old Blowhard, as the whites dubbed the Fox chief, offered La Chance all the land on every side as far as he could distinguish a mounted pony from an unmounted one, standing on a certain elevation. The consideration on La Chance's side was a barrel of whiskey.

"The less said about that whiskey the better, perhaps, for it was a vile compound of acids and vinegar, and would eat out a copper kettle overnight, La Chance used to say, although I never quite believed that. He claimed in defence, though, that it was the kind the Indians liked best. They always wanted their drink to bring tears to their eyes. I don't wonder they named it fire-water.

"The elevation in question was the very one upon which our court-house stands. So you will please imagine this slope, on a certain day not quite a century ago, swarming with braves, squaws, papposes, dogs, and ponies, with Old Blowhard and La Chance at the top. Out on the level prairie, in each direction of the compass, and something like a mile away, was a mounted Indian accompanied by a loose pony.

"'Brother,' said La Chance, looking to the south first, 'I can see plainly. The mounted pony is on the left. Tell him to go farther.'

"Old Blowhard grunted, for he had rather expected

The Pride of Tellfair

to tell his brave to come closer, having but a poor opinion of the Frenchman's eyesight. Then he nodded to two Indians who held a blanket over a smudgy fire. Retarding the smoke with this blanket, they sent three clouds heavenward, and the Indian to the south rode farther off. He took the precaution, though, of making the ponies circle and cross each other in a most bewildering fashion, so that La Chance could by no possibility carry either in his eye. You see, they didn't have very much faith in us whites, even then.

"'Brother,' said La Chance, 'my eyes are weak. I will look through these tubes to shield them from the sun.' Upon which he hauled out a pair of powerful field-glasses. Old Blowhard blinked doubtfully.

"'The mounted pony is on the left,' said the worthy Frenchman.

"Again the old chief grunted and nodded, again the rider receded, and again La Chance picked him out. This process was repeated until the Indians crowded around in admiration of the long-sighted pale-face. Yet it is true that when the ponies were mere blurred dots in La Chance's glasses, there was one clean-limbed young Indian who stood stiffly erect, with folded arms, near his chief, and reported to him, from his naked eye, when La Chance chose wrong.

"After the four boundaries had been thus established and duly marked, Old Blowhard said, solemnly, but with a twinkle in his beady eye: 'Now, brother, turn your tubes to the sky, if they will shield your eyes as well in that direction, and see if the Great Spirit doesn't think you are getting too much land for a barrel of whiskey.'

"This was so good that La Chance, who was a man of humor himself, as you may have gathered, added the glasses to the barrel of whiskey, telling the chief that with these he could see his enemies afar. 'Blowhard can see his enemies now farther than they can see him,

The Pride of Tellfair

which is enough,' answered the chief, 'but he will keep the tubes so that he may see too clearly another time to make a fool bargain with a white man.' Which remark, I thought, deserved still another addition to the barrel of whiskey," she concluded, smilingly, and bowed and retired.

"Morris," said Bertha, drawing him aside for an instant in the confusion of the disintegrating crowd, "Lucile Hillyer is here. She and another girl drove over from Sun Prairie. She wants to see you and have you meet her friend."

"I'll bring Miss Priestley, too."

Bertha looked doubtful.

"I thought we could all go down to the office and talk awhile," said she, vaguely.

"Can't Miss Priestley go and talk, too?" he asked. Bertha's desire to separate Josephine and him was quite apparent.

"It seems to me," said she, struggling with the anger which she had been repressing for hours, "that, after you have given most of the day to Miss Priestley, you might be willing to give a little time to some one else."

"Very well. I'll get Miss Priestley out of the crowd, and then I'll meet you and the girls at the office."

But he did not, owing to an unforeseen event.

XIV

AS Davenport moved off with Josephine he saw a group of jostling people along the hitching-rack. Pushing in, he found that Emory Spencer's aged, sway-backed horse had lain down during the exercises and peacefully died—during Elbridge Smith's recital, it was afterwards claimed. The old man stood by, stunned, helplessly rolling one small nut-brown hand in the other, nervously wetting his lips, and repeating to himself, "Mother will be so sorry, mother will be so sorry." It was not the loss of the horse's value which affected him, for Emory was neither poor nor stingy. It was the unexpectedness of the situation, the rude break in his methodical life, together with a natural affection for an animal which he had bred and reared and used for a quarter of a century.

"I will take you home, Mr. Spencer," said Davenport, sorry for the old man. "You can send one of the boys in to-morrow for the buggy. The town will haul the carcass away, so you needn't worry about that. I will notify the street commissioner myself."

The old gentleman accepted the proffer with tremulous thanks. But by the time Davenport's single-seater and pair were brought up by a stable-boy from Hayford's, Emory was distressed by the thought of leaving his ramshackle buggy behind overnight, and timidly suggested that it be lashed behind Davenport's. Davenport assented, though not without a pang at thought of the scratches his brightly varnished running-gear

The Pride of Tellfair

would receive. A rope was brought, the two vehicles fastened together, and all made ready for the start. Then, at the last moment, Emory announced his intention of riding behind, in his own buggy, to watch the lashings.

"Well, I am certainly not going to ride alone," said Davenport, with a smile at Josephine, to her slight confusion. "Miss Priestley, won't you keep me company?"

She looked at the beautiful horses longingly.

"What time is it?" she asked, reflectively.

"A quarter-past four."

"And how far?"

"Eight miles."

Her face fell.

"Oh, that would make it too late."

"I'll promise to set you down at your gate in time for supper," said Davenport, promptly.

Josephine looked incredulous, though no more so than Emory Spencer, who always allowed himself an hour and a half to drive each way. She yielded, however—it was sweet to yield to those masterful hazel eyes—sent word to Victoria, and was helped into the glistening, soft-seated conveyance. Emory was hoisted bodily into his lofty old rattle-trap, and they were off.

The cool northeast breeze had ministered faithfully to the Old Settlers all forenoon, but since dinner it had rather overdone its part and piled the heavens with clouds. These, very shortly after Davenport and his charges had started, grew black and threatening; thunder growled in the distance, lightnings leaped up on the murky horizon, and a few big drops fell in the dusty road with little explosive puffs, like bullets. Davenport got out his side-curtains and boot, made all snug, brought the old man forward, and then sent the spirited horses flying on. In five minutes the rain was coming down in sheets, with the roar of a waterfall.

The Pride of Tellfair

It was nearly half-past five, owing to delays and flooded roads, when they reached Spencer's. Emory and his wife insisted on their staying for supper; and, as the storm showed no signs of abating, they did so. Six o'clock came—seven—eight, and the inexhaustible reservoir above was still letting down its waters.

"We *must* get home to-night, Mr. Davenport," said Josephine, in a low, anxious voice, when they were momentarily alone.

"We will."

"Because my sister would be terribly worried about me. A storm always makes her nervous."

"Do you want to start now?"

"I should like to. I am not afraid of the rain. But if you think it will stop soon—" She paused.

"It seems as though it must. Yet it may rain this way for hours."

"Then let's go home," she murmured, so confidently and appealingly that he felt a thrill within.

In borrowed wraps, they set out. It was pitchy dark, and Davenport's finding the gate was little short of marvellous to Josephine.

"Why, you are wet through already!" she exclaimed, as she accidentally touched his sleeve.

"Not through. I got that in hitching up."

"I thought Mr. Spencer's boys were going to do that."

"They helped. Every man understands his own horses best. Besides, on a drive like this, I prefer to look after the harness myself."

She was glad that he had looked after it himself, but said nothing, because she was also sorry that he was wet.

No straining of eyes could pierce the darkness. An occasional gleam from some pool along the road-side was all that could be seen. With each flash of lightning a strange, ghastly world was revealed for a blinding instant. It was best—indeed, necessary—to let the horses

The Pride of Tellfair

go their own way and regulate their own speed, which they were loath to increase above a jog-trot. Their shoes rang sharply on the freshly washed gravel of the pike, and the wheels swished through brimming ruts and depressions.

The storm had worked around in a half-circle, and most of the electrical disturbance was now in the southwest, from which direction the wind also came, blowing in their faces. It had grown colder, too. But the boot came up to their chins, the curtains were tight all around, and it was warmer and snugger in the buggy than any one safely housed would have believed.

Davenport thoroughly enjoyed the situation. He felt an undefinable nearness to the woman beside him. It was as though he and she were in a little world of their own. It would have been easy to love her, and easy to tell her so—just then; just as easy, he fancied, as if he were in reality the only man and she the only woman in the world. He noticed, too, that she betrayed a tendency to lean close to him, as if she also felt their isolation; and this discovery, it may be imagined, did nothing to dispel the witchcraft already at work in his brain.

So pleasing were these thoughts that he did not speak for a long time, and she was equally reserved. But there came a moment when he felt that he ought to speak, that to speak would be a kindness to her, especially if the silence were telling her all that it was telling him.

"We don't have to look out for teams," said he, finally.

"No," she murmured, briefly.

All he could see of her was a pale cheek. At least, it looked pale, and he asked her if she were cold. She said no. Then, if she were wet, and she said no again.

"Afraid?"

"No—not with you," she answered, so simply and sin-

The Pride of Tellfair

cerely that again he felt that peculiar thrill within, as if an invisible hand had twitched a heartstring.

Then they came to an abrupt stop.

"What's that for?" said he, to the horses. "Go 'long!"

They stirred uneasily, but refused to advance.

"That's horse-talk for 'Something wrong,' and it's just as plain as English," said he, unbuttoning the boot on his side. "Something wrong with the harness, probably."

He stepped down and felt both horses over. He found nothing amiss. Puzzled, he peered ahead. He saw no obstacle, because he could see nothing, but a few feet in advance the road seemed to be blacker, if that were possible, than just beneath his feet. Moving forward cautiously, sidewise, and feeling his way with his feet, he found that the road had sunk.

If this were the culvert between Hennessy's and Green's, as he was quite sure it was, there ought to be a passage on the side, along what in dry weather was a smooth, noiseless dirt-road, a favorite with lovers on moonlight nights. It was lower, though, than the pike, and was probably under water.

"What's the matter, Mr. Davenport?" came Miss Priestley's anxious voice out of the darkness.

"Nothing except a bad place in the road," he answered, cheerily. "We'll go by on the side as soon as I investigate a little."

He slipped down the bank and instantly felt water strike through his shoes. The way to investigate was to wade in, and this he promptly did, with no thought of rheumatism or pneumonia. In the deepest place the water reached his thighs, and was therefore fordable. Returning to the team, he backed them until they stood squarely across the road; then, cautioning Josephine to hold tight but not to be afraid, he led the horses down

The Pride of Tellfair

the steep embankment without mishap, although they protested snortingly against such foolhardiness.

Davenport climbed in; the horses splashed through the water, plunged and strained up the sodden ground on the other side, and after a little, of their own accord, put the gritty gravel of the pike under the wheels again. Josephine, meanwhile, clung tightly to Davenport's arm—unconsciously, he was sure, from the haste with which she released it when they were on dry land again.

"You didn't get wet, did you?" she asked, naïvely.

"Not a bit," said he, wriggling his toes to squeeze the water out of his shoes.

"As I sat there in the buggy," she continued, in a little, low, grave voice, "I was just thinking what in the world I should do if I were alone."

"You would have done just what other women have done when thrown upon their own resources—taken care of yourself. People are helpless, usually, only when there is some one to help them."

"Nevertheless, I am glad there was some one to help me," said she, and he would have given much to catch the expression on her face.

"No gladder than I," he answered, so boyishly that he instantly blushed for himself. Yet he continued, just as boyishly: "I feel as though I had come to know you better in the last few hours, Miss Priestley, than in all the days that have gone before."

"Why, I was just thinking that myself!" she exclaimed. Then, laughing, she added: "And I have been wanting to tell you about—about your hat. Just look at your hat, Mr. Davenport! I noticed it when you got in last. I couldn't see before."

He took off his straw hat, and found that under the soaking it had received the flat crown had shot up into a mountain-peak. Josephine was shaking with sup-

The Pride of Tellfair

pressed laughter, and doubtless he did look ridiculously like a new Robinson Crusoe in a goatskin cap.

"When I get home I shall have to lay my Bible on that hat to press it flat again," said he, gayly.

"And if you can't find your Bible, I'll lend you mine," she retorted.

He would have enjoyed all this more, though, if they had been safely across Turkey Creek, which was subject to treacherous and incredibly sudden rises. He was not given to worry, however, and was forgetting everything else in Josephine's recovered spirits when he suddenly became conscious that the horses were wading in deep water. They had splashed through so much shallow water that the sound had almost ceased to catch his ear. Swinging one foot out, he was amazed and somewhat alarmed to find that the buggy was already immersed axle-deep.

He stopped the horses instantly, and was arranging his words so as to give Miss Priestley the least alarm, when the elements saved him that trouble. A belated flash of lightning threw with appalling vividness upon their retinas a vast flood of yellow, angry, swirling water on every side, dotted with brush-heaps and up-rooted trees. Upon the breast of this flood they themselves seemed afloat. Just above them blackly loomed what, in the weird, green glare, looked like a gallows. But Davenport knew that it was the upper works of the iron bridge over Turkey Creek, and thanked God inwardly for the fact, for it showed that the horses had not wandered from the road.

Josephine emitted a cry of terror and desperately seized her companion's arm. The horses started nervously at her cry. Davenport soothed them with a word or two, and then all was still save the moaning, lapping, and gurgling of the invisible water. The sound made even Davenport's stout heart quail, for this same

The Pride of Tellfair

hungry creek, a few years before, had swallowed a family of eleven in one dreadful night, not a hundred rods away.

"Don't get frightened, Miss Priestley," said he, earnestly, "and we'll get out of this all right. You have simply to leave it all to me. Now I am going to get out, locate the bridge exactly, test the water on the other side, and then lead the horses across."

"But you'll get wet!" she exclaimed, holding him tight, with no thought of the triviality of her objection.

"I'm already wet to my waist. Besides, there is no other way."

"Can't we turn around?"

"No. We are on the approach to the bridge; its banks are steep and high, and it is too narrow to turn on."

"Can't we get out and walk back, then? I'd sooner get wet, and stay in a farm-house all night, than cross that terrible place." She shivered at memory of the lightning's grewsome revelation.

"We could do that, if it were necessary. But it would leave your sister to worry all night, unless we could get a telephone message through, which is doubtful. We should have to abandon the buggy, and it would be a tricky business to get the horses out in this inky atmosphere. Altogether, it would be—a little cowardly, don't you think?"

"Very well. I'll do what you say."

He found a foot of water, perhaps, on the bridge. How much lay beyond, where the road fell away from the opposite approach, he could only surmise. As he remembered the bottom-land, the water should not be deeper on that side than on the other. If it were, and the buggy should float, and the horses become unmanageable, as they certainly would with a floating buggy behind them— He shuddered at the thought. Again, the bridge was apparently firm; but if it had been

The Pride of Tellfair

undermined, and should give way under the horses' weight, it would mean nearly certain death.

He waded down the farther approach as far as he thought safe in the swift water, for he dared take no chance of being swept off and leaving his helpless charge alone. Strengthened in his belief that this side was fordable, he returned to the bridge. Here he stood a moment in doubt. Had he been alone his course would have been clear. But he had no right to jeopardize *her* life. To cross the bridge would be to do this, while he knew he could get her out safely in the other direction, though at the loss of his buggy and possibly his horses.

"Miss Priestley," said he, from the horses' heads, and his voice sounded strangely distinct in the blackness, "the bridge may not be safe—though I think it is; and the water beyond may be deep—though I think not. Shall we go on or turn back?"

"Oh, let's go on!" she cried, eagerly. "If these beautiful horses should get tangled in their harness and drown, on account of me, I should feel like a murderer."

"I don't want you to consider the horses," said he; but he was considering them himself, and liked her the better for doing it, too.

"I must consider them!" said she, in a tense voice. "Please go on!"

Davenport faced about and led the reluctant horses forward. The bridge sustained them without a tremor. Then they began the descent on the other side, very slowly and cautiously, for to get off the approach would be to plunge into ten or twelve feet of water. When the water reached Davenport's waist, he called to Josephine to put her feet on the seat and hold up her skirts. When it reached his armpits, cold as it was, the sweat streamed down his temples. The horses were already snorting and plunging in terror over their uncertain

The Pride of Tellfair

footing. If it got much deeper! But it would not, could not, *should* not. Sure enough, it did not. The water grew shallower, and when it had fallen to his thighs he released the horses and climbed into the buggy again.

"Thank God!" said he, fervently.

She was silent for a moment, then she impulsively laid her hand upon his sodden coat.

"You are *so* wet—and cold!" said she, pityingly.

"Except right *there*!" he answered, for her hand was still upon him.

She said nothing, and he could not see her face. He was content, though, when he helped her down at her gate, after ten o'clock, and she said:

"Now get out of those wet clothes instantly and drink something to warm you up, and go to bed, or I shall never forgive myself."

XV

THE arguments in the murder trial about which Davenport had spoken to Josephine happened to fall on one of Bertha's lesson days. She appeared at her teacher's in even more than her usual splendor, and announced that she was going over to the court-house to hear Davenport's speech. She also invited Josephine and Victoria to go with her. The girls hesitated, but Bertha assured them that there was not the least impropriety in a woman's going. Otherwise, Morris would certainly not have suggested that she herself go, or ask them. This settled it, for both the girls were curious to attend a court and to hear Davenport's speech.

The court-house square was fringed with teams from the country. The upper windows, they could see from below, were packed with men and boys. The courtroom was already filled to stifling, and overflowed into the corridor, where the throng pushed and jostled for a better place, and craned their necks and tiptoed for a glimpse inside. The prospect for the three girls was not encouraging, and the Priestleys hung back timidly. But Bertha had privileges, either professional or personal; and a little bullet-headed deputy, who presently burst out of the press like a shot out of a gun, took in the situation at a glance. He at once led the pretty, scented, rustling trio up a narrow, winding staircase which had an air of privacy, unlocked a door, and passed them into a section of the gallery which still held some empty benches.

The Pride of Tellfair

They found seats in the first row. Below them lay the awesome mill of justice, already solemnly grinding, but whether the grist was life or death no one could yet say. The judge, a scholarly, fatherly old man, with thin, white hair, sat high above the others, and with folded hands gravely surveyed the flushed and eager crowd. There was a half-sorrowful expression on his face which made Josephine shrink back a little, loath to be numbered by those clear eyes among the curious women gathered there.

At the judge's left sat the jury; just below him, the clerk of court; and just below the clerk, in a railed enclosure, around a big table spread with books, a group of people—lawyers, witnesses, and court officers.

Among these, but a little apart, sat Morris Davenport and Belotzerkowski, the Russian Jew on trial for his life. Time was when people smiled at that name and fumbled it with their tongues—when the man first appeared in Tellfair, looking for work. But no one saw anything funny in the name now, and even children could pronounce it. For it had sprung into a sinister, terrible familiarity on that morning, some months before, when the sun, peeping through Alexander Newhouse's curtains, caught the farmer in bed for the first time in many years—in bed, cold and stark, with a knife in his heart.

The State's attorney had finished his speech, and, when the girls arrived, judge, jury, and people were awaiting Davenport's defence. Yet he seemed unconscious of the fact and sat looking over some notes, his back to the spectators, his head propped on his hand. Josephine wondered if he could possibly be as cool as he looked, for as he sat there he might only have been writing out that little advertisement for her and Victoria. As she looked, and the silence grew more tense, her heart began to palpitate in a sort of sympathetic fear.

The Pride of Tellfair

But if judge, jury, and people were waiting, what shall be said of the prisoner? He sat—if one may speak of such a shapeless, inert heap as sitting—with drooped shoulders, sunken chest, and hanging arms, more dummy than man. His eyes only were alive. To these all the fires of life seemed to have retreated from his miserable, terrorized body, and there stood at bay, burning like peep-holes in a seething furnace.

Yet he saw neither court nor crowd; nor the jury, who could snuff out his life like a candle; nor the afternoon shadows, creeping along the wall like the slow-moving finger of Fate; nor the clock, whose busy ticking was edging him, possibly, nearer and nearer the grave. He knew not when the State's attorney rose up nor when he sat down, and the lawyer's pitiless execrations had fallen upon his stupefied senses as harmlessly as rain-drops on granite.

He saw only Davenport's thoughtful face. No starving hound ever eyed morsel of meat in friendly hands with more pathetic eagerness or trembling intensity than this wretched prisoner eyed his defender. Not a movement of the latter escaped him. Did Davenport lift his pencil, the prisoner brightened. Maybe it was all over! Did Davenport open a book, the prisoner started. Books were dark, diabolical enigmas to him, not to be trusted even in the hands of his protector. When Davenport whispered something to the turnkey, the ignorant Russian, who doubtless regarded his jailer as the only barrier between him and liberty, grew so excited that Davenport had to quiet him.

But the climax came when Morris arose and crossed the railed space to address the jury. A ripple of excitement, arising to sharp ejaculations here and there, ran through the audience; for the long-haired, unkempt, unwashed Belotzerkowski, seeing his guardian leave him, rolled out of his chair, and, after a stupid, blinking,

The Pride of Tellfair

bestial stare at the audience, shambled awkwardly after Davenport, like a huge orang-outang rather than a man. The turnkey sprang forward and seized the prisoner. Belotzerkowski turned upon him with a snarl, and for an instant trouble threatened. Then Davenport, turning at the commotion, pointed out a chair; and the Russian, instantly submissive and cowering, sank into it like a trained spaniel.

Davenport's speech was a great one, everybody said, and so Josephine felt as she listened. It seemed hardly possible that this man, so terribly earnest, standing there in that grave tribunal of justice, pleading for a human life, could be he who had chaffed old Billy Manderson, or sat by her side in the buggy on that stormy night and joked about his straw hat. She knew he believed the prisoner innocent, in spite of the man's almost hideous aspect, and he had told her why, just as he was telling the jury now. And as he stood there, so clean, so straight and manly, his red hair clustering around his brow, resolute and unafraid when all others had turned in loathing from the wretched being he was defending, her woman's heart went straight out to him.

Yet she was glad, when all was over, to fill her lungs again with the comparatively cool and pure air of the corridor. She had fancied that the court-room was tainted with the foul breath of Belotzerkowski's dungeon; and so deeply had the bestial fear and revolting besottedness of the prisoner been burned into her brain that she yearned to escape from the scene.

"Let's wait in the register's office a little while," said Bertha. "I don't think it will take the jury long to settle Belotzerkowski's fate."

She led the way familiarly into a cool, high-ceiled room, furnished with large leather chairs and high, slanting desks strewn with big folios. At present the place was empty, as doubtless was every other office in the

The Pride of Tellfair

building at that moment, everybody having gone to hear the end of the trial.

Bertha's light tone jarred on Josephine's taut nerves, and she asked with some reserve, "What makes you think it won't take the jury long to decide?"

"Because all the evidence is against him, though it's only circumstantial," answered Bertha, learnedly. "Nobody could really hope to save him. Morris as good as said so himself."

In spite of this, Josephine was by no means persuaded that Davenport's speech was a perfunctory performance. His fervent, solemn tones were still ringing too loudly in her ears. With no mind to argue the question, however, she sank into one of the comfortable chairs. Bertha led Victoria to the other end of the room, and, opening one of the massive volumes, with a girlish pride in her legal knowledge, she naïvely explained how mortgages, deeds, and other legal instruments were recorded.

A little later a group of men dropped in, discussing the trial, and evidently seeking a cooler place than the court-room in which to await the verdict. According to them, Belotzerkowski was by no means yet a dead man; and, had he not been such a Caliban in appearance, they were certain Davenport would have cleared him. Then followed certain complimentary remarks on the young lawyer's masterly defence, which made Josephine proud that she could fairly claim him as a friend.

In the midst of this, the door opened once more and Davenport himself appeared. He halted in the doorway and wiped the perspiration from his face. He seemed about to withdraw, at sight of the men, but they were too quick for him. After briefly thanking them for their compliments, he caught sight of Josephine and turned towards her. His step lacked its usual elasticity, and he looked weary and relaxed. His eyes,

The Pride of Tellfair

though, were feverishly bright. He was still the accused man's advocate rather than Josephine's friend; the atmosphere of the court still enwrapped him; and as he sat down he exhaled a sense of power which made the young woman half afraid. She would not have dared to joke with him now.

"You have been working hard and splendidly, Mr. Davenport," said she, earnestly.

"I thank you very much. I have certainly been working hard."

He was not exactly cold, but he was preoccupied and possibly a little indifferent. So far from resenting this, though, Josephine respected him for it. The man who could come out of such a fiery furnace without the smell of smoke could justly be suspected of trickery. There was surely no trickery here. Yet Bertha's words annoyed her.

"Mr. Davenport," said she, nerving herself to the question, "you couldn't possibly make such a noble effort as that without your heart in it, could you?"

He looked at her oddly. "Why do you ask?"

"Not that I doubted your sincerity," said she, quickly, almost eagerly, at his tone. "But because—because Bertha spoke as though you thought this man's conviction a foregone conclusion."

"Did *you* think so, from my speech?" he asked, and seemed disappointed.

"No, no. Anything but that. I'm palpitating yet. Please don't be severe with me. I know I ought not to have said it."

"It's all right," said he, simply. "I'm a little sensitive about such things. You understand that there is no money in this for me. The man is penniless, and I was appointed by the court to defend him. Half the people don't know that, and the other half probably think that I was trying to clear a guilty man in order

The Pride of Tellfair

to make a reputation." He paused and glanced across the room at Bertha and Victoria. "Bertha has a habit of jumbling her opinions and mine, and stamping the mixture with my seal."

Bertha was still explaining the big books, but Victoria was stealing wistful glances at her sister and Davenport, as if she, too, wanted to hear him talk about his great speech. At last she tore Bertha from the books, to which she had clung with unaccountable pertinacity. Even then Bertha, instead of going over to Davenport and Josephine, halted by the door in an uncertain fashion, and seemed about to leave. It struck both sisters as strange that she had no word of commendation for her friend and employer.

"Are you going?" asked Josephine, rising.

"Yes, I think I'd better. I have some work to do at the office. But you needn't come." Bertha smiled, but there was a constraint about her which did not escape Josephine's eye.

"Let the work go," said Davenport. "The office has earned a rest."

But Bertha shook her head and passed abruptly out. Josephine, who had seen some of the workings of Bertha's mind, stole a curious glance at Davenport. But if he was at all disturbed by his stenographer's behavior, he hid his feelings admirably. Still, the incident rather dampened the party, in a way; Josephine and Victoria felt a little out of place without Bertha, and after a moment Davenport said, glancing at his watch:

"I fancy we all might as well go. The jury may be out for hours. The longer it is out, the more auspicious it is for me."

"Let us go, then, by all means," said Josephine. "Our mere presence here may hasten their verdict, if there is anything in mental telegraphy."

The Pride of Tellfair

Davenport walked home with the girls, and tarried a moment on the steps with Josephine after Victoria had excused herself to look after tea.

"Did you go over there this afternoon on Bertha's invitation?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, and knew that he had Bertha's abrupt departure in mind.

"Would you like to take a little ride to-morrow afternoon?" he asked, after a moment. "I am going into the country, and I should like to have you see my father's farm."

"I should be glad to go, but I am afraid I can't. I shall be busy with pupils until three o'clock."

"That will be time enough."

"Then I shall be glad to go—provided it doesn't look like rain," she added, mischievously. "I shall be ready by a quarter-past."

That night Josephine awoke to find Victoria sobbing, with her arms around her neck.

"Why, Vic, what on earth is the matter?" exclaimed Josephine, in alarm.

"Oh, Josie!" whimpered Victoria. "I dreamed that that horrible Belotzerkowski was after me."

"Well, he isn't," said Josephine, soothingly. "Morris Davenport has him in charge."

At the breakfast-table Victoria asked, when her nocturnal performance came up, "Last night, Jo, did you say *Mister* Davenport to me, or Morris Davenport?"

"I don't remember," answered Josephine, taking a hasty sip of coffee.

But she did remember. And when, half an hour later, she received a brief but exultant note from Davenport stating that the jury had found Belotzerkowski not guilty, she was very happy.

XVI

DAVENPORT was thoroughly vexed over Bertha's exhibition in the register's office. That she should be jealous of his five-minute talk with Josephine was almost incredible, but he knew it to be true; and as he sat in the office of the Basley House, smoking his evening cigar and reflecting on the events of the day, he said to himself, emphatically, "Thank God, I'm a free man!"

By morning he was in a softer mood—especially after receiving the jury's verdict. Bertha had struggled visibly, the day before, with her weakness, and he half regretted the invitation he had given Miss Priestley to go riding. The invitation had really nothing to do with Bertha or her conduct. But when he went out to his father's he usually took Bertha, whom his mother liked; and he fancied she would expect to go to-day, although he had said nothing to her about it.

"I am going out to Meigs's now, Bertha, and father's," said he, a little before three, "and I probably sha'n't be back before six. You can lock up at five."

Miss Priestley's name was on his tongue. He wanted no secrecy about her going. But, on the other hand, to mention her now would sound like an apology, and no apology was due. He therefore said nothing.

"Very well," answered Bertha, coolly, without looking up. "I have an engagement at five, so it will suit my plans." Which was equivalent to saying that to take her with him, as usual, would not have suited her plans.

The Pride of Tellfair

As Davenport and Josephine bowed swiftly along the smooth, white turnpike behind his favorite horse, he was thoroughly happy. He was probably not yet conscious that there was something in the woman at his side which always made him happy. With her, he was always up to pitch, as it were. She seemed, by some subtle attraction, to draw to the surface the best that was in him.

"That is the Witch's Caldron," said he, pointing out one of the isolated groups of great rocks which dot the northern prairie of Illinois and are probably of glacial deposit. The one in question was on the bank of Rock River, half a mile away.

"Don't I know it!" she exclaimed, joyously. "We have picnicked there—our family—so many, many times. The next time you happen to go there, I want you to climb the rocks and look on top. You will see all our initials carved there, with a border around them. Father did it one evening, and I shall never forget the beautiful sunset that day."

"Suppose we drive over now," said he, boyishly. "It won't take ten minutes."

"Do you mean it?" she asked, eagerly. But he had no sooner turned the horse by way of answer than a curious revulsion took place in her, and she said, "Not to-day, Mr. Davenport, if you won't think it strange. Some time we'll go, and then I'll tell you why I didn't want to go to-day."

But the moisture shining in her eyes had already told him. Too many of those dear initials were now also cut in tombstones.

"We lawyers," said he, after a decent silence, "deal much with the seamy side of life, and too often are birds of ill omen. But to-day I am not. I am going to stop and see a man who suffers from rheumatism and must go South. His farm is worth six thousand dollars. It

The Pride of Tellfair

is mortgaged for four thousand, and foreclosure would have been made in less than four weeks. The farm would then have been sold at auction and would have brought, perhaps, enough to pay the mortgage and interest. A few days ago, however, I happened to strike a man who wanted just such a farm, and who thought six thousand dollars a fair price. He signed the papers yesterday, and I have them in my pocket now for the owner to sign. It will surprise him, too, for the buyer did not seem at all favorable to the place when I took him out to see it."

"I suppose the family will be very grateful to you," said Josephine, slyly, "and I shall have an opportunity to see that side of a lawyer's life which is not seamy."

"You won't see much. People of their type are not emotional. I once happened to be driving by this man's farm—Homer Meigs is his name—when his little four-year-old boy ran into his reaper and lost his leg just below the knee. The father carried the child into the house to its mother, and it is a fact that I have seen more fuss made over a pup whose tail somebody had rocked on than they made over that limp, white-faced little boy."

"Oh, Mr. Davenport, that is heartless!" exclaimed Josephine.

"No, just true," said he. "They loved their child and proved it well, but it was not their way to make a fuss. I ruined a good horse in running a doctor down, but it took me three hours at that. Every minute of that time the father sat with his hands gripped tightly around the poor little fellow's leg to keep him from bleeding to death. As a result, his arms were partially paralyzed for three years; and the rheumatism from which he suffers to-day dates from that terrible hour. The mother, meanwhile, sat by and fanned the little one and wiped the moisture from its brow."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Oh, how could she stand it!"

Davenport smiled grimly.

"She was built to stand such things. If this mortgage had been foreclosed and the family turned out into the road, she would have stood that, too. When Meigs goes down South and loses what little money he will realize from the farm, as I fear he will, and they find themselves paupers in a strange land, she will stand that, too. That is why I don't expect her to weep on my neck in gratitude to-day."

As they drove up to the dilapidated farm-house, a pack of curs rushed barking out, but retired yelping after a taste of Davenport's whip. A slatternly woman, not old, but gray, appeared in the open door, accompanied by a band of ragged children. She looked as if neither grief nor joy could wring a tear from her bone-dry eyes.

Among the children, sure enough, was a dirty-faced, hatless, red-headed urchin with a wooden leg from the knee down. He looked like a neighborhood terror, and stumped swaggeringly out among the weeds in the doorway, with his hands in his pockets, and whistled between his teeth.

"Where's Homer, Mrs. Meigs?" asked Davenport from the buggy.

"He's chorin' around the barn, I reckon," she answered, fretfully, eying the well-dressed Josephine with covert hostility. "Leastways, he was there. I suppose he's down in the wood-lot across the creek by this time, now that somebody wants him. Go find your pap, Eddie, and tell him Lawyer Davenport wants to see him."

Not only Eddie, but two or three others, went at full tilt; but Peg-leg, as the boys had dubbed him, was in the lead in spite of his maimed condition, his little jacket streaming out behind, and his shaggy head bobbing rapidly up and down on his mismated legs.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I suppose it's something about the place," said Mrs. Meigs, as they waited.

"Yes, I have sold it to Mr. Andrews for six thousand dollars," answered Davenport, nudging Josephine to note the effect.

Something very like blood leaped into the woman's sallow cheek, but it was not until after she had partly untangled one of the little girls' pony-like manes that she spoke.

"I suppose we ought to be thankful, though it's no more than the place is wuth."

When he saw Meigs coming, Davenport got down and tied the horse, and helped Josephine out, whom he wanted for a witness. Meigs was a sunken-chested, weary-looking man, with a straw in his mouth; but there was a gleam of hope in his eyes at Davenport's presence.

"He's sold the place"—said Mrs. Meigs, briefly—"to Andrews, for six thousand."

"Is it sure?" asked Meigs, and Josephine thought his voice trembled.

"As sure as death," answered Davenport. "I have the papers in my pocket."

"Then I'm mightily obliged to you, Mr. Davenport, to say nothing of the commission," answered the man.

They entered the dirty, bare house. When both husband and wife had affixed their names to the instrument, he looked at her with a wild gleam in his eye, which one might call hope.

"Well, I guess that settles it *now*, and we go South."

For answer, she unexpectedly burst into tears, and covered her face with her apron.

"This is the only place on earth we kin call home. All my babies was born here, and I hoped to be buried here."

The Pride of Tellfair

Meigs glanced helplessly at Davenport. He had seldom seen his wife cry, and it rather alarmed him.

"You'll have another place to call home soon, in a section where your husband's health will be better than it is here," said Davenport. "As for the other, it doesn't make much difference where we are buried."

"No, it don't, as long as we are buried. And the sooner the better, I reckon," said she. "Susie, drop that kiten. You'll be all full of fleas again."

Josephine was silent and thoughtful for some minutes after leaving the farm-house. Davenport naturally laid it to the scene she had just witnessed, but it was not wholly that, it developed.

"Did the man who bought this farm know that it would probably be sold at auction in a short time?" she asked, finally.

"Probably not."

"You didn't tell him?"

"No."

He stole a glance at her sweet, sober face. He knew what was in her mind. He could have made a good argument in defence of his conduct; he could have cited precedent after precedent for his act from every department of the commercial world. But somehow he felt that they would fall flat with her. So he fell to thinking, instead, of the ennobling influence a good woman has over a man, and the thought was as fresh and inspiring as if he had discovered it. In a sense, he had.

"I am glad those poor people got all their farm was worth," said she, a moment after, "which they wouldn't have got if it had been sold at auction."

He took it as forgiveness of his deception of Andrews with regard to the impending foreclosure.

It was glorious, when they reached the Davenport farm, to go rolling across pasture and meadow in a buggy, with no sign of a road anywhere, flushing prairie-

The Pride of Tellfair

chickens, scattering sheep, and arousing mild curiosity in the sleek Alderney cows. Josephine had thought a buggy as dependent upon a road as a locomotive upon rails. Davenport proved it otherwise. He forded creeks, threaded gullies, shot through unexpected openings in fences, climbed hills, descended into valleys, and wound swiftly through a cool wood. In this last, it is true, there was a semblance of a road; but Josephine expected momentarily to be brought up against a tree, and begged him to drive slower. They finally halted and alighted in a partially timbered bottom-land, where a thick carpet of violets made Josephine cry out with delight. In a few minutes they had gathered all they could carry.

"I feel like a child again, when I used to read about the farm—the cows and horses and hay-mow and the old spring-house," said she, happily, on the way home. "Oh, I think the ideal life could be lived on a place like your father's, with your own land as far as your eye could reach, and the pure air in your nostrils every minute of the day, and money enough not to have to worry about crops."

"In some respects, it is the sanest life a man can live," said Davenport, smiling at her enthusiasm, "and is doubtless preferable, in father's case, to the great majority of lives. Father's case, of course, is exceptional. He represents one extreme of farming; Homer Meigs, for instance, the other. My parents have nearly every luxury in their home which city people have, besides a great many that city people can't have. Yet there is a lack of social intercourse, and there are other serious disadvantages, and they talk more strongly each year of 'retiring' and coming to town to live. Their hearts are wrapped around the old place, and they can't bear the thought yet of seeing it in a tenant's hands—they would never sell it, of course. But some day

The Pride of Tellfair

they will put it in a tenant's hands and come to town."

Josephine shook her head disapprovingly.

"They could have social intercourse out there. They could invite their friends out."

"They could anywhere else but in America. Everybody works here, and is too busy to go even that far for social purposes except on rare occasions."

"But do you think they would be happier in town?"

"I don't know. It is hard to change the current of life at their age. We have many retired farmers in Tellfair, and I think some of them ought to be back on the farm. They have converted their town lots into miniature farms, and you can see them pottering about the yard and barn from morning to night, hungry for work. Yet I think most of them enjoy life, especially after they have learned to get up at seven or eight o'clock instead of four or five."

"If Tellfair is an improvement on the farm, why wouldn't a city be an improvement on Tellfair?" she asked.

"It is, in many respects."

"Why don't you go to a city, then?"

"That question has disturbed me more than once," he answered, seriously. "Shall a man be a big toad in a small puddle or a small toad in a big puddle? I'm here, I suppose, more by chance than anything else. My ancestors have hewn the way and I am walking in it. Necessity has not driven me to the city as it has many."

"But haven't you wanted to go?"

"No, for I have no reason to suppose that I could better my condition there. I might make more money, but I should also spend more. Of course, fortunes are made there that could never be made here; but where one succeeds, thousands fail. Besides, the city is a

The Pride of Tellfair

place of few masters and many slaves, and I don't like slavery."

"I think you could be one of the masters," said she, simply.

"I don't know. I'm one here, in a way, and a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. To tell you the truth, I hate a city. I hate a social condition where a man may never know his next-door neighbor's name, although I understand that it has to be so. I hate to have simply a wall or floor or ceiling between me and people in whom I have no more interest than I have in a Hottentot. I was in the city the other day and took dinner with a classmate who lives in a flat. There was a funeral in the building that day. The coffin was carried down the same steps and out the same door that my friend uses every day. Do you suppose he knew who was dead, or whether it was man, woman, or child? No. Now that may be all right for people brought up to it—it didn't seem to affect him; but it won't do for me. It depresses me. I like to know my butcher and grocer, and their families. I like to know the man who comes into my office, whether he is rich or poor, sick or well, happy or unhappy. If he has had a child recently born or buried, I like to know it." He paused, and added, laughing, "Possibly I may impress you as being an ideal old lady."

"No, indeed," said she, quickly. "I agree with you in all that. Yet we people out here do not have the advantages of city people in the way of culture—music, drama, lectures, and such things."

"No," he admitted.

"And there is a certain stimulus in the city that is lacking here."

"Yes. But I believe it is secured at the cost of something else fully as valuable. In the city a man's character is not developed evenly. There is too much speci-

The Pride of Tellfair

alization. The commercial sense must be keen, for it is tested daily, but the rest doesn't matter much. Think of the thousands in Chicago who are identified with no church, no lodge, no club, no social organization, no anything—who don't even vote, are never called upon to exercise their public spirit, and are nonentities everywhere except in their places of business. They live in good houses, too, wear good clothes, and eat the fat of the land."

"But is the proportion any larger than in Tellfair?"

"I think it is. The nonentities here are the abject poor. They would be poor in Chicago or anywhere else. I mean to say that there is something about a great city which seems to capture all the forces of the average man and take them in one direction, instead of allowing them to work naturally in all directions. Of course, there are thousands of people in Chicago that that doesn't apply to; and it is also true, perhaps, that the city is the home of the most successful people in all walks of life—the giants. I am talking now of the average man."

XVII

JOSEPHINE arranged her violets in a bowl and set them on the piano. There they still sat on the following Tuesday, when Bertha Congreve came to take her lesson.

"My violets are about gone," observed Josephine, as Bertha glanced at the bowl.

"Where did you find so many?" asked Bertha.

"Mr. Davenport and I gathered them on his father's farm, last Saturday. There were millions of them, I should say. I never saw such a beautiful sight in my life before."

"Last Saturday?" said Bertha, with a queer expression.

"Yes, last Saturday afternoon," said Josephine, wonderingly, for Bertha's face was quite pale.

"How stupid of me!" exclaimed the other. "Do you know what I was thinking of? I was wondering how you could have picked violets and attended the trial on the same day. But the trial was on Friday."

But Josephine was not quite satisfied with the explanation, which rang false. Moreover, Bertha went through her lesson in a blundering, preoccupied way.

Bertha went home instead of returning to the office. She told her mother that she was not well, and went at once to her room, where she threw herself upon the bed. She did not cry, but for three hours she was torn and scarred by the black, bitter imaginings of her heated

The Pride of Tellfair

brain. At that moment she thought Davenport the prince of deceivers.

About five o'clock she heard the door-bell ring, and a moment later her mother entered.

"Morris is here, Bert. He did not know what had become of you. He says he dictated some important letters to you, which must be got off to-night; but if you are too sick to transcribe them out he will do it himself."

"Tell him that I can't possibly go back, or I shouldn't have come home," answered Bertha, faintly.

But in less than two minutes she conceived the notion that it would be a noble, a heroic, thing for her, stricken as she was—by just what she did not know—to get up and go down to the office and get out those paltry letters for the man who had deceived her so cruelly.

Davenport was sitting at the typewriter and sparring with the keys in a blundering, uncertain fashion when she came in. He looked up with surprise.

"I didn't mean for you to come down," said he. "Didn't your mother tell you?"

"Yes, but I thought I had better come," she answered, languidly, as she removed her hat.

"I think you had better go back. You don't look well. I'll take care of these letters. Only two or three are important."

"I can do it as well as not, now that I am here."

"But there wasn't any need for you to be here," he answered, sharply, resenting her tone.

"Morris," said she, suddenly, drawing herself up in pale, statuesque dignity, "I can stand coming down to the office and working when I am sick, but I can't stand your speaking to me in that way. You have done it more than once of late, and it—it simply breaks my heart." Her nostrils were quivering.

Davenport instantly repented his words. Yet he still

The Pride of Tellfair

resented her unjust implication, and half suspected that she was shamming.

"Do you really mean that I have been unkind to you, Bertha?" he asked.

"Don't you know that you have?" she returned, tragically.

"Upon my honor, I do not. If I have been, I am sorry; and you will have no cause to complain in the future. I am sorry you thought you had to come down here. I am sure Volley misunderstood me. But I don't want you to get out these letters, and I am not going to let you. Sit down there. I'll telephone for the horse when I'm done and take you home."

Fifteen minutes later she was seated beside him in his runabout. She was by no means mollified, however, and racked her brain for a way to inform him, without betraying herself, that she knew of his excursion with Miss Priestley. Davenport's horse, though, was fast, and the distance was short, and they were at the horse-block before the delicate problem was solved.

"Can you come around to-night?" she asked, as he helped her down.

"I don't see how I can. I have an engagement," he answered, as regretfully as a man could who felt no regret.

"I have something important to tell you," she added, darkly.

She did have some wild notion at that moment, although it had not occurred before, to tell him that she did not consider him bound to her—that if he preferred Josephine Priestley's society to hers, he was free to have it.

"Won't to-morrow night do?" he asked. He had had some experience with her "important" communications.

"Where are you going to-night?" she demanded, rudely, and without a note of apology in her voice.

The Pride of Tellfair

He hesitated an instant. There was temper under that red hair, but it seldom escaped him.

"I am going to see Miss Priestley," he answered, quietly.

She looked at him coldly, steadily, venomously.

"You refuse me for her?" she asked, fairly trembling.

"I do nothing of the kind. I have an engagement with her that I am bound in honor to keep. I'll come to see you to-morrow night, if you have something to tell me."

"You may come, but I shall have nothing to tell you then. It may not be so important as I thought," she added, resignedly. "Some things that I used to think important, and you, too, don't seem to be important any more."

"That's all foolishness, Bertha," said he, lightly.

"Do you mean to say that you haven't changed towards me?" she asked, sternly.

"Certainly I haven't changed. What should change me? I am just as good a friend of yours as I ever was." He used the word "friend" advisedly. "But I think *you* have changed. I don't know what has got into you of late."

"Nothing has got into me. It's all in you," she answered, bitterly.

"Well, let's not quarrel about it. That won't help matters any."

"I don't wonder at your not wanting to quarrel. You haven't the heart for a quarrel. What you have done pinches your conscience. You know you haven't any case. You prefer to go your way without reminders of your unkindness, deceit, and neglect."

This indictment, delivered in short, emphatic periods, like hammer blows, and with peculiar virulence, made Davenport's blood tingle. There was just enough truth

The Pride of Tellfair

in it to make him smart, and enough untruth to make him indignant. Yet he kept himself well in hand.

"Name a single instance of unkindness, deceit, or neglect on my part," said he.

"There are things one feels but can't name."

The truth of the remark touched him, though he did not admit its present application. He knew, too, in his heart that the woman before him had some cause to feel aggrieved, although he did not see how he could admit it without her taking advantage of it.

"I'll talk this over with you to-morrow night, Bertha," said he, friendlily. "Neither of us is in a mood for it now. And you will tell me that other thing then, won't you?"

"No, I have decided not to tell that," she answered, firmly. "I may some time."

He rode away in a decidedly critical mood with himself. The falseness of his position was becoming plainer every day. To assure a woman whom he regarded only as a friend that he had not changed, when he knew that she regarded him as a lover, was not a pleasing act for a man with a conscience. He was insisting that he was yet her friend, while she wanted to make him say that he was yet her lover. Lover of hers he had never been—but how could he tell her so? How could he retract avowals he had never made, or ask to be released from engagements into which he had never entered?

Yet something must be done. There were no avowals or engagements, but there was something which Bertha had accepted in lieu of them—his little attentions and kindnesses. How much of this was he responsible for? Much of it was chargeable to their official relations and to his intimacy with the family. Yet there was one fact which he could not forget, and which he could not think of without a kind of self-execration. That was that there had been a time when he regarded this woman

The Pride of Tellfair

as a possible wife, whether he had told her so or not.

He ground his teeth at his past blindness, and cursed himself for a fool. At the same time, he sternly set himself against any more weakness. If he had hurt her, he was very, very sorry. But pity should not do duty for love. If she fancied that he loved her, he must show her that he did not. He need not rudely undeceive her, he argued. He could gently, imperceptibly, draw away from her. After a while there would be a gulf between them, and she would scarcely know how or whence it came. She would scarcely realize, he hoped, that it had not always been there.

XVIII

AFTER a month's trial, the process of imperceptibly drawing away from Bertha could not be pronounced a success. Davenport treated her with studied kindness, but avoided with equal care the first step beyond. He still took her riding and still called on her, but not as often as before; and he divested this intercourse as far as possible of any personal significance. He was merely her benevolent employer, her parents' friend, and her friend.

At first Bertha seemed puzzled. He caught her more than once studying him with wistful, thoughtful eyes, and the sight wellnigh betrayed him into weakness again. But after a while she apparently adjusted herself to the change. She took on a sedate, dignified mien in his presence. Her little, playful familiarities fell away from her as leaves fall from a frost-bitten tree. At the same time, the rugged strength of trunk and limbs came into view, but the nakedness gave Davenport a pang.

During this month he rather avoided Miss Priestley. His motive was a complex one, but it may be said that his self-respect was suffering. In his lifetime he had seen, perhaps, four women whom he thought he could love. Bertha was the fourth, and on trial he had failed. A distrust of his own heart had sprung up in him, and in this mood he preferred to avoid all women, and especially *one*.

He did call, though, a few times on the Priestley girls for the sake of appearances, and once on business.

The Pride of Tellfair

As president of the Tellfair County Fair Association it fell to him to select a young woman to act as Ceres in what was known as the corn festival. The selection was nominally in the hands of a committee, but it was understood that the president should name the goddess. He had called to ask Josephine to act in this capacity.

She was a little long in coming down, and when she entered the room, radiantly beautiful, it was evident that the delay had been over her dressing-table. She was also a little flushed—perhaps from hurry.

"Of course, I prize the honor, Mr. Davenport," said she, when he had made his proposition. "But isn't there some one else more deserving of it than I—some one who has lived here longer and is better known?"

"Well, yes. There is Jane Fleetwood. She has lived here fifty years, I should judge, although she says it's only thirty-five, and I think every man, woman, and child in Tellfair knows her."

The image of the angular, weather-beaten spinster posing as Ceres tickled Josephine's fancy; and though she had resolved beforehand, for certain reasons, to be rather formal with Mr. Davenport, she laughed heartily.

"I could name others who have lived here even longer," he added.

"You know what I meant. I meant some girl whose family is identified with Tellfair, not an interloper like myself. Frances Marsh, for instance, or Kittie Hayward, or Bertha Congreve."

"Doesn't it strike you that Bertha is a trifle spare to impersonate a goddess of plenty?"

She colored a little, but retorted gayly, "If it's mere bulk you are after, I could suggest one or two who would prove ideal."

"It is not mere bulk—it is *you* we are after. What's

The Pride of Tellfair

more, we are going to have you. I can't even mention the numerous qualifications you have for the rôle—you would accuse me of gross flattery. But I shall report to the committee that you will serve."

"Well, I suppose I shall have to," she answered, slowly. "What am I expected to do?"

"Merely to sit on a float and look plenteous. Your float will be our *pièce de résistance*, and very elaborate. I shall appoint a committee of three ladies, merely as a matter of form, to help you devise a costume. You can wear what you please. You needn't spare expense, within reasonable limits. The Association will pay for it. Mrs. Bowman will be one of the committee, and I would advise you and her to get together and talk it over before the others are appointed. I will see that you have time to do it," he added.

Josephine did talk the costume over with Mrs. Bowman, and another thing besides. It was a thing which had worried her a little, and, in fact, made her resolve to be formal with Davenport the last time he called.

"Mr. Davenport has been kind to me in various little ways since I came here," said she, casually. "He has taken me out riding once or twice, and has called several times."

"If he hadn't, I should have been after him," answered Mrs. Bowman, promptly, burrowing in her work-basket for a spool of silk.

"Yet I have been wondering," continued Josephine, with a quite unaccountable thumping inside, "if I haven't been the cause of some—well, possibly some unhappiness."

"Unhappiness!" echoed Mrs. Bowman. "In whom, pray?"

"I hope you won't think me foolish, but in a certain young woman in this town," answered Josephine, blushing.

The Pride of Tellfair

Mrs. Bowman laughed derisively, yet entertained a secret admiration for the loyalty of the girl to her sex.

"I certainly do think you foolish. Do you mean Bertha Congreve?"

"Yes, I do, Alice."

"What put that notion into your head?"

"Is it a notion?"

"Answer my question first!" commanded Alice.

"Well, Bertha has acted rather queerly whenever we three—Mr. Davenport, she, and I—have been thrown together."

Mrs. Bowman stitched in silence a moment.

"I'll tell you one thing, Josephine, about the Congreves—the women. They think they hold a first mortgage on Morris Davenport, and Volley is just as insistent upon its recognition as Bertha is. She uses him as freely as she does her thimble—I was going to say broom, but that wouldn't express it at all, if you have ever been in her house. If she wants to go out to her mother's, five miles in the country, she asks Morris to take her, if Bradley Hayford doesn't happen to be around." She glanced up with a funny little gleam in her eyes; it was her first allusion before Josephine to the relations between Volley and her cousin. "She does it with as little hesitation as if he were her coachman. When he goes to the city, which he does three or four times a month, she gives him a list of what she wants, and he shops for her as docilely as the worst henpecked husband you ever saw. He's too good. Now I think," she continued, complacently, "that you have probably offended Bertha's feeling of ownership. You have been sliding down her cellar-door. But tell me what she has done, if you don't care."

"Oh, it's hardly worth while, and I may have misjudged her," said Josephine, hesitatingly. Nevertheless, she cited Bertha's conduct on the day of the trial,

The Pride of Tellfair

and afterwards in connection with the violets. Her dark, lustrous eyes awaited Mrs. Bowman's opinion rather anxiously.

"Well," answered Alice, impartially, "the girl may be in love with him, in her way, for all I know. I said in the beginning that it was foolish for him to take her into his office. He could have helped the family in some other way. But if she *is* in love, you may be sure it is none of Morris's doings. They run around together, of course. But it's just as I tell you—he is in harness and can't get out. As for his ever having paid her any serious attentions, it's absurd. If he had, I think I should have known of it. He and I have had a good many confidential chats. She is not a woman who could satisfy him. Why, he regards her as a child!"

"Perhaps that is how the trouble began."

"There *is* no trouble," answered Mrs. Bowman, decisively. "And if you go to treating him coolly on any such grounds, Josephine dear, I shall never forgive you."

"I may not have a chance," said Josephine, laughing. "He hasn't been around so often of late. I thought, perhaps, he had awakened to the fact that he had been indiscreet, and—"

"Look here, dear," said Mrs. Bowman, sweeping aside her work. "I want you to have a good time this summer, and I don't want you to cut yourself off, by any sentimental foolishness, from the only young man in Tellfair who can give it to you. Now I am going to tell you something, and I want you to consider it sacred. Morris Davenport told me himself that there was absolutely nothing between him and Bertha Congreve."

"When?" asked Josephine, after a moment.

"A month or two ago."

"How did he happen to tell you?"

"You doubting Thomas! I asked him."

The Pride of Tellfair

"But how did you happen to ask him?"

"Simply because a lot of gossiping old women in this town, who might at their age better have their thoughts on that place where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, make it their business to report every man and woman engaged who appear together twice in public, and I wanted to be able to thrust their stories about Morris and Bertha back in their teeth. And I have had the pleasure of doing it several times since. Now are you satisfied?"

"I suppose I am," said Josephine, but not convincingly.

"Have you heard some of these stories yourself?"

"No."

"His own denial ought to satisfy you."

"Oh, I am satisfied that *he* doesn't consider himself bound to her."

"My dear, you are provoking. Let me kiss you before I slap you!" exclaimed Alice, leaping to her feet, for Josephine was going.

Alice broached the subject at tea to Mr. Bowman, but his mind was in the clouds over his next Sunday's sermon, and he took her disclosures very coolly indeed, merely remarking that she had better not meddle with other people's affairs. She was a little hurt at this, and very much disappointed, for there was no one else to talk it over with. But she had lived with her husband long enough to know that there were moments when he was hopelessly superior to all mundane affairs.

A few days after the first meeting of the costuming committee—in other words, a few days after it had become publicly known that Josephine was to act as Ceres—she took from her post-office box a letter bearing a one-cent stamp and addressed in a palsied hand. She spelled out the following:

The Pride of Tellfair

"DEAR MISS PRIESTLEY,—You will pardon this epistle, I trust, but I have lived in this town longer than you, and I know what it is. I do hate to say it, as was born and bred here, but this town is a hotbed of gossip. Oh, how many sweet girl's name have I heard on the foul lips of liars. I don't want to see yours there, so I take this opportunity to warn you not to accept the part of Series. It is a well known fact that Morris Davenport is engaged to Bertha Congreve; and though it isn't for me to say that he ought to have chose her for the part, there are others who *Have Said* it. I hope you will not think me meddling, and I know you will thank me for this advice some time. I have not the pleasure and honor of your acquaintance, but I hope some day to be able to make myself known as the author of this epistle. Not that I take any credit for it. It is only my Christian duty, which I trust I always try to perform, and have these thirty years.

"A FRIEND."

Josephine read the letter in the post-office. At first she was inclined to laugh, but before she got home she was nearer crying. The mere thought of her name being bandied about by a clique of scandal-mongers was terrifying to the high-spirited girl; and though an anonymous communication was always open to suspicion, the tenor of this one so perfectly accorded with her own misgivings that she at once gave it credence. Victoria, however, with no such misgivings, breathed scorn and defiance upon reading the letter.

"Some meddlesome, hypocritical old tabby-cat wrote that!" she exclaimed. "She's trying to curry favor with you, and if you take her advice you'll have her mousing around here some day in a poke-bonnet and her best black alpaca, scraping an acquaintance. I should think a person who wrote a letter like that could be arrested."

"You'd have to find your person first," said Josephine, with a nervous laugh. "There is nothing very bad about it."

The Pride of Tellfair

"It is bad!" said Victoria, hotly. "It is a libel on Morris Davenport, and it makes you unhappy. It is a vile, contemptible, cowardly piece of work. Nobody but an old woman who had nothing to do but think evil of others would suggest that Mr. Davenport gave you the preference over Bertha on personal grounds."

"I know that. But if this idea is in one person's head, it might be in another's."

"I don't care if it's in a million. Are you going to back down?"

"Would you have me talked about?" asked Josephine, quietly.

"No. And I wouldn't have you under the thumb of some nameless, evil-minded old woman, either," she answered, with tears of vexation.

"There is another thing to be thought of," continued Josephine, gravely. "A story of this kind might affect our popularity as teachers. I am as reluctant to submit to a thing of this kind as you are, but I think we ought to keep out of these village factions, if possible. Alice has told me repeatedly how careful one has to be here in Tellfair. Some of her stories have actually frightened me."

"I don't believe a lie can hurt anybody except the liar," returned Victoria. "Why don't you ask Alice about this?"

"I might," said Josephine. "Yet I dislike to. I dislike to have this insinuation suggested to her mind." A faint rose-color overspread her temples.

"But she will have to know about it, if you refuse to take the part."

"I don't know that I need mention the letter." She looked at her sister wistfully. She longed to be perfectly candid, and to tell her all that she suspected of Bertha Congreve. But some things cannot be told, even to one's sister. "I think I had better drop Mr. Daven-

The Pride of Tellfair

port a note and ask him to call. I don't like to go to his office—now."

"You had better go to the office. It will be less conspicuous than sending a letter through the post-office and having him call here."

"Will you go with me?"

"Of course. But I think it would be less embarrassing if you went alone. You have a perfect right to do so, and I wouldn't let them make a coward of me."

"If anything would make a coward of me, it would be something just like this. But it hasn't yet," and she smiled bravely. "I'll go at once, and have it over."

She was a trifle pale as she put on her hat, and Victoria put her arms around her and kissed her.

"Don't worry, Jo. It will come out all right."

As Josephine passed down the street, old Mrs. Betts, with her heart beating at unwonted speed, sat at her window, straining her eyes through her longest-sighted lenses. When she saw Josephine slip an orange-colored envelope into her bosom—the anonymous letter—the old lady's excitement became so great that she had to leave her sewing-machine and slip out into the back yard for air. It had just occurred to her that she might be the only person in town who used orange-colored stationery, and that one of her letters, although unsigned, could be easily traced back to her by a skilful detective. A boy drawing a stick along her picket fence gave her such a start that she clapped her hand over her heart; and when she saw Pete Blanchard, the constable, coming up the street, half an hour later, she fled panic-stricken to her attic, where she remained until the unconscious minion of the law had passed harmlessly by. Surely a guilty conscience needs no accuser.

XIX

JOSEPHINE had not failed to note the change in Bertha Congreve—the slight pallor, the new reserve. She halted in the hall before Davenport's door with an almost unconquerable dread of facing the girl and asking for her employer. The thought, too, that Bertha must now know that she had been chosen for Ceres did not make her any easier.

Bertha, seated at the typewriter, looked up with disconcerting coolness as Josephine entered. Yet there was no hostility in her glance, or even disdain; simply perfect indifference. It piqued Josephine that she should quail before a chit of a girl like this, yet it required her last reserve of self-control to ask, in a natural, friendly tone:

"Is Mr. Davenport in, Bertha?"

"No, he's out. I think he will be in soon."

Josephine stood in doubt a moment. She did not want to wait, but she also did not want to be seen coming to the office again. Bertha did not ask her to sit down, but she finally did so without an invitation.

"You can wait inside, if you prefer," said Bertha. It was impossible to say whether this was a thrust or a hospitality. Josephine accepted it for the latter.

"Oh no, I'll sit here and talk to you. But perhaps you are busy," she added, glancing at the writing-machine.

"It's a part of my business to entertain clients," said Bertha.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I am afraid I'm not a client to-day."

It struck her, after it was out, as not a happy speech, and Bertha raised her blue eyes at once, steadily, stonily, as if to say, "You needn't tell *me* that." She said nothing, though.

In the midst of the painful silence which followed, Davenport's quick, peremptory step sounded on the stairs. As he entered, his eyes slipped swiftly from one woman to the other, as if to ascertain the state of affairs.

"Well, what's in the wind to-day?" he asked, lightly, of Josephine.

"Nothing of great importance."

"We shall see. Everything is of some importance to somebody, as I believe I once told you before, and you told me back again. Just step in here. Somebody will be sure to blunder in on us in this room before we are done."

Josephine felt that the last was a sop thrown to Bertha, and, glancing up as she passed through the door, she was not surprised at the girl's scornfully curling nostrils.

"I said it was of no importance," she began at once, "but perhaps you will think it is. I have been considering the matter of my impersonating Ceres since I saw you, and I have come to the conclusion that I cannot do it."

Davenport looked up in surprise.

"Haven't you reached that conclusion rather late—after consulting with the ladies of the committee and adopting a costume?" he asked. He seemed a little sarcastic.

"It may look that way," she answered, breathing faster, and feeling as if it were her hard fortune of late to alienate everybody with whom she came in contact.

"I—I—you remember, no doubt, what I said about there

The Pride of Tellfair

being others, possibly, who had more claims to the honor than I. I find that this feeling is entertained by others besides myself, and under the circumstances I would rather not serve—especially as it can make no difference to you. I dislike to give the impression of—of pushing myself forward and taking advantage of your friendship."

"Who are these people that you speak of?" he asked.

"I can't mention their names—I don't know their names, and I would rather you wouldn't ask how I found it out," she answered, almost desperately, fearful of offending him, and yet shrinking from making the source of her information known.

Davenport drummed on the table with his fingers, clearly vexed, yet doing his best to hide it.

"The decision lies with you, of course," he said, finally. "But your refusal at this late hour to serve puts me in a somewhat embarrassing position. I have notified the committee of your acceptance. I have appointed a costume committee congenial to you, and the costume has been adopted and ordered, all of which is a matter of public knowledge. What excuse can I give for your withdrawal? It seems to me that the one you have given is hardly adequate. At least, I doubt if it will be accepted without comment. And I must say, Miss Priestley, that if all people were as sensitive to criticism as you appear to be in this instance, the world would come to a stand-still to-morrow. No minister would preach another sermon, no lawyer try another case, no author write another book."

"I am sorry you think so ill of my courage," she answered.

"I must confess to a feeling of disappointment."

"Perhaps you don't quite realize the delicacy of our position here in Tellfair—my sister's and mine—without parents or relatives or sponsors of any kind."

The Pride of Tellfair

"I think I do. I hope I do," he returned, relenting. "But I must tell you this in all kindness: if you are to be turned from your course by every breath of censure in this town, you will never arrive anywhere. Your trail will be as devious as that of a snail. I am not going to urge you to accept this Ceres business, however. I don't want to compel you. I will simply say that you are acceptable to the committee, to me, and to the town, so far as I know. I give you my word, I haven't heard one syllable of fault found with the appointment. Of course, there are people who would comment unfavorably on any course that any human being could take. If Christ himself appeared in the flesh in Tellfair tomorrow and preached a sermon, there are people who would find it unorthodox."

"You are offended," said she, regretfully.

"No, simply disappointed."

"You think I am weak," she continued, timidly.

"In this instance, I think you are."

She dropped her eyes for a moment.

"There must be some fault-finding, or I shouldn't have heard what I have," she continued, faintly.

"Not knowing what you have heard, I can't say."

"That is the second time you have been sarcastic today," she protested.

"I don't think I could be very sarcastic with you," said he.

The next instant the vexing letter, almost without her volition, was out of her bosom and on the table.

"Read that!" said she, in a low voice.

He looked first at her and then at the envelope, but without offering to touch the latter.

"An anonymous letter?" he asked.

"How did you know?" she exclaimed, in astonishment.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I can spot a disguised hand nine times out of ten. Also, from what you said."

Josephine, with a fast-beating heart, watched him read the scrawl through. When he was done he quietly folded the letter again and returned it to the envelope. But there was fire in his eyes.

"I suppose you know that this is a lie."

"The part referring to you?" she asked, with a flutter.

"Yes. Not only that I am engaged, but that it is generally believed."

"I had never heard it before. I—I knew nothing about it."

"Well, we won't go into *my* troubles now," said he, lightly. "But do you offer this cowardly letter as an excuse for your withdrawal from the festival?"

She met his glance unwaveringly this time.

"I offer it, Mr. Davenport, in order that you, who know just how much truth it contains, and how careful I have to be, may tell me what to do."

"I tell you to serve," he answered, instantly.

"Then I serve," said she, no whit slower.

"I should like the honor of grasping your hand on that!" he exclaimed. And she, blushing, gave him her hand.

"A word about this letter now," he continued. "It was evidently written by some well-meaning but meddling old woman with a vast imagination and free access to the choicest sources of gossip in this town. It is self-condemning, not only by its anonymity, but by its tone. If I were you, I should try to forget it. I am very glad, though, that you showed it to me. Half-confidences are always disastrous. Had you not shown it and allowed it to scare you off, I doubt not that the truth would have leaked out in time, through the writer

The Pride of Tellfair

herself, and people might have attributed your timidity to a guilty conscience."

He spoke his convictions. Yet after Josephine had gone he regretted ever having asked her to take part in the festival. He regretted anything, nowadays, that connected his and Bertha's names.

XX

A MEETING of the corn festival committee was held the next day, in a back room of the First National Bank. Davenport arrived late. As he entered the room, a dead silence fell, and he knew as well as if told that something had been up for discussion on the assumption that he was not coming. It remained for Mr. Bradley Hayford, in the prolonged silence of the others, to explain what this something was.

"We've just been discussing this Serious business, Morris," said he, blandly. The most elaborate statement could not have made the situation any clearer than did the apologetic note in Hayford's voice and the skulking look of some of the other committee-men.

"What about it?" asked Davenport, dryly.

"Well, we've just been kind of talking over the candidates," answered Hayford.

"I was not aware that there were any candidates."

His voice had a razor edge. Lucius Shaw, president of the bank, winked at one of the committee-men. Lucius loved a fight, as long as he was not in it.

"Well, there is some," said Hayford, bluntly.

"Who nominated them?" asked Davenport.

"I don't know as anybody nominated 'em. Their names just come up like."

"What are their names?"

"Miss Priestley for one, and Berthy Congreve for another."

"I am sure I don't understand, gentlemen, why this

The Pride of Tellfair

matter should have been brought up for discussion at all," said Davenport. "As chairman of this committee, and exercising a privilege which has been attached to that office for years, I asked Miss Priestley to accept the part of Ceres. She did so, and I so reported at the last meeting. There were no objections made to her then, and I don't understand why there should be any now."

"Nor I!" piped old Ezra Holden. "But it seems there be," he added, dropping his toothless jaw in a grin.

On the committee were Lucius Shaw, Lowdermilk Tidd—leading merchant of Tellfair—Tom Feversham, and a number of less prominent people. As Davenport looked them thoughtfully over, he saw scarcely a man there whom he had not, at some time or other, favored. He saw men whom he had elected to office, loaned money to, sent business to, or given a social boost. One man he had reconciled with his wife, another he had saved from bankruptcy. Yet so precarious a thing is public favor that Davenport doubted if he could command a majority in that body, if it came to a contest, without using the whips of interest and fear.

"I hain't any objections to Miss Priestley, personally," observed Hayford. "But she's a new-comer here, and it looks to me as if we hadn't ought to give our old girls the go-by in order to cater to a new one. I ain't much on that myself."

"Do you mean to insinuate that anybody else on this committee is?" asked Davenport, ominously.

"I don't insinuate anything," answered Hayford, with his provoking, oxlike placidity. "I'm simply sayin' how it *looks*. It looks as if we was simply fallin' over ourselves to curry favor with people that once cared mighty little for our favor."

"It may look that way to you," retorted Davenport, contemptuously, "but I should hate to have the public

The Pride of Tellfair

believe that this committee took any such jaundiced view of the matter."

"There's young ladies here," continued Hayford, as unheeding as a turtle under an attack of mosquitoes, "whose people have always lived in town, and been identified with it and the fair, and I think they ought to come first. Berthy Congreve is one of them."

"There is some justice in Hayford's remarks, Morris," said a little, wizened man, with a spot of color as bright as paint on each cheek. "I don't agree with him that the Priestley family at one time held the village in contempt. In that I think he does an eccentric family an injustice. But it does seem to me that it would be more fitting to choose a Ceres from one of our old village families."

"Why didn't you say so, then, Mr. Cranmarsh, at the last meeting?" asked Davenport.

"I wish I had," answered the old gentleman, regretfully. "But as there was no objection from any one else, I held my peace."

"I wish you and everybody else had continued to hold it," growled Lowdermilk Tidd, in his fat throat.

"A mistake is made," said Davenport, "in regarding this rôle of Ceres as an honor, or a piece of political patronage. Miss Priestley was by no means anxious to serve, but I urged her to do so because I think she is admirably fitted for the part. She is tall and queenly in appearance, is dark, and possesses considerable dignity and beauty. It was simply a matter of business with me, and that is what it ought to be with you."

"That's right," assented one of the members.

"What's the matter with Berthy, from a business point of view?" asked Hayford, bull-doggishly.

"She's too slight," said Davenport. "On the top of that big float she would look like a doll-baby, and her small features would hardly be distinguishable at twenty

The Pride of Tellfair

yards. Besides, she's light-complected, and would offer no contrast to the sheaves of grain around her."

"I think one person can take that part about as well as another," returned Hayford, stubbornly. "There's nothing to do but set there."

"Then why not use your brindled bull-terrier?" asked Davenport, sarcastically. "He's as good a 'setter' as I know of."

This reference to Hayford's lazy and obese canine pet provoked a laugh.

"Morris has just explained that there is something to do besides sit there," said Cranmarsh, impatiently, to Hayford. "As to his objections to Bertha, I must confess they sound reasonable. I hadn't thought of them before."

"Why not try somebody else, then?" suggested some one.

"What do you want to try somebody else for? What is your objection to Miss Priestley?" demanded Davenport, wrathfully.

"What are *your* objections to somebody else?" asked Lucius Shaw, perhaps just to keep the animals stirred up.

"Because Miss Priestley has been asked by me to act, and has consented to act," said Davenport, closing his lips like a steel trap. "Whatever might have been said against her at first is of no weight now. The only fair and honorable thing to do now is for this committee to officially designate her as its choice. To refuse this, at this late hour, after her name has been noised around town, through no fault of her own, would be a humiliation to her and a rank injustice."

Hayford shot a meaning glance at one of his colleagues, and that gentleman at once suggested, most innocently, that they ballot on the respective candidates—simply in the interests of peace. Davenport

The Pride of Tellfair

saw the glance. He was, moreover, familiar with Hayford's methods in county conventions; and he knew that this call for a ballot meant that Hayford and his partisans had "fixed" enough of the committee-men, one way or another, to give Bertha the choice.

"I object!" said he. "This opposition, whose hatching-place I know well enough"—with an unveiled glance at Hayford—"has gone too far. It is not merely a matter of humiliating Miss Priestley now, although that ought to settle the question for every gentleman present. It is a matter of compromising *me*. If you force this issue to a vote, I shall regard it as a personal matter—whether or not I, as president of the fair and ex-officio chairman of this committee, am to be repudiated in one of my official acts."

"It isn't that, Morris," ventured a peacemaker. "There is plainly a difference of opinion here, and it is only fair to give it expression."

"No," returned Davenport, "it is only fair now *not* to give it expression. I can see, if some of you can't, what is brewing. Last week there was no objection made. Since that time certain outside influences have been at work on an over-susceptible member, and I most decidedly object to giving this hostile outside influence any expression whatever here. I would object to a ballot even though I knew that it would result in Miss Priestley's choice."

"What outside influence do you refer to, Davenport?" asked Hayford, with an ugly light in his pale-blue eyes. He knew, of course, with the rest of the committee, that Davenport meant Volley Congreve, but a "bluff" of some kind seemed necessary to his pugilistic mind.

"I think there is no doubt in anybody's mind, Bradley Hayford, least of all your own, as to whom and what I mean," returned Davenport, scorchingly.

Hayford was slow to anger, but his face now took on

The Pride of Tellfair

a brick-red flush, and he glared at Davenport threateningly. Davenport met the glare with a calm and steady eye.

"Gentlemen," interposed Danny McMaster, one of the conservatives, "I move that we take a secret, informal ballot on this question."

"Secret ballot be damned!" roared Lowdermilk Tidd, his big, red face redder than ever. He was on Davenport's side and wanted everybody to know it. "Let every tub stand on its own bottom."

Little Danny subsided—not because he was afraid of Lowdermilk Tidd's loud voice, but because he hated swearing and noises of all kinds. But another man, not so sensitive, seconded Danny's motion, and after some bickering it was carried. Several of Davenport's supporters gave their voices in the affirmative, simply to produce harmony, and because they were quite sure that Davenport would be vindicated.

Davenport, however, in the heat of battle, could not see this, and regarded the carrying of the motion as a personal affront. He weighed the committee in his eye for a moment. He thought he might obtain a majority. But the mere possibility of Josephine's rejection, which would confirm all her doubts and fears and give the lie to his words of reassurance, nerved him to play his last card. He arose, hat in hand.

"You can vote as you please, gentlemen, secretly or openly," he said. "But when you vote, bear these points in mind. Miss Priestley was chosen by me from practical, not sentimental, considerations. But if you must be sentimental, you might do worse than crown your industrial procession with a woman who, having once lived here in opulence and social seclusion, returns to Tellfair, bereft of family and fortune, and bravely sets to work to earn a living.

"There is one other thing that I want you to consider

The Pride of Tellfair

well, each one of you, before you write a ballot against her. If Miss Priestley is rejected, it is war between me and the Tellfair County Fair Association from this hour. If I haven't your confidence, I don't want the presidency of the fair ; and I shall consider your refusal to confirm my choice as a request for my resignation."

He paused a moment for this to soak in, then continued, grimly:

"If I go, my race-horses go—my exhibits, my influence, and my good-will. I can promise the same for my father and my tenants. I don't wish to assume the rôle of dictator, and you all know that I have ever been open to reason, and time and again have given away to the wishes of others. But in this matter my pride is at stake, and, if you don't want me with you, you shall have me against you."

He paused again in a dead silence, and put on his hat. Turning towards the door, he added:

"This is a personal matter, and I cannot vote. I will therefore leave you to your deliberations."

Lowdermilk Tidd waddled out after him, bareheaded, into the main room of the bank, and begged him not to throw away what might prove a precious vote out of mere pride.

"If the committee is as anxious as that to cut its own throat," answered Davenport, caustically, "I would give it a knife sooner than a vote."

Davenport had long been at the head of the fair, and usually had his own way. But in return for this he had always given generously when there was a deficit. He had swelled the track purses with money from his own pocket, and had thus contributed more to the success of the races than even Hayford himself. He was untiring in working up a friendly rivalry among the farmers in their live-stock exhibits, and had won their gratitude by protecting them in the matter of prizes

The Pride of Tellfair

from professional breeders outside the county. He had originated the idea of a Woman's Building, devoted only to the handiwork of that sex. From that year dividends took the place of deficits on the association's books, and the stockholders rejoiced accordingly.

In view of all this, the action of the committee hurt him. It would be public property within twenty-four hours. It might possibly escape Josephine's ears, for she had not yet been admitted into the star-chamber of the village gossips. But Bertha and her mother would certainly hear of it—through Hayford, if no one else. Preferring them to have his own version first, he explained to Bertha, upon reaching the office, his position in the matter, and how he had been forced into an attitude of apparent hostility to her.

She listened without emotion.

"You had a right to choose any one you pleased," she observed, coolly.

"But I pleased to choose Miss Priestley only on account of her qualifications for the part," he again reminded her.

"You would have had a perfect right to choose her for any other reason."

"Only I had no other reason, is what I wanted to make clear."

"Morris," said she, with a smile which might have veiled either a bosomful of contempt or a breaking heart, "I don't want you to feel that it is necessary for you to explain your motives whenever your conduct touches me. I don't know of anything that would make me more repugnant to you, in time, than that. Besides, I think you can safely let me judge your motives for myself."

Davenport flushed. He had, in truth, been explaining overmuch of late.

"Common courtesy seemed to require this explanation," he answered, quietly.

The Pride of Tellfair

Without reply she went on indexing the letter-book. Davenport, unwilling to leave the matter in this unsatisfactory stage, lingered a moment, watching her work.

"You spoke of my leaving my motives to you for judgment," he said, after a little. "Do you think your judgments of late have been as kindly as they might have been?"

"Not kindly, but just," she answered, without looking up.

He smiled at her dramatic tone. Bertha was always more or less of an actor, even in her sincerest moments.

"Then you think I have forfeited your kindness?" he asked.

"Don't you think you have?" she returned, abruptly, with no attempt to disguise her accusing eyes.

Now was the golden moment to wipe away this whole wretched tissue of ambiguity and misunderstanding; to tell her frankly that he wanted to be her friend, but could not be her lover. Not in so many words, of course, but in effect. Yet he could not bring himself to it. It was, in fact, a delicate matter, and he did not see his way clear.

"I do not," he answered.

"Do you mean to say that you are conscious of no change in your manner towards me?" she asked, sharply.

"I may have changed in some respects. But I have the same respect and friendliness for you that I ever had."

This was pretty plain, and she understood. She smiled icily and scornfully, but turned distinctly paler. She continued her writing, but her set lips and slightly distended nostrils reminded him of some poor, wounded animal. For the thousandth time, perhaps, a depressing sense of guilt swept over him, and he yearned to qualify a little the harsh import of his words. But he knew in his heart that the only way to do that was to

The Pride of Tellfair

lie. To let her suffer, and to suffer with her, was all that was left him to do. Yet still loath to leave her without a parting word of some kind, he hung about the room for some time. Then, to his amazement, he heard her laugh.

"I was just thinking," she explained at his glance, "that if any one should look in on us now they would think a tragedy had been enacted."

He could scarcely believe his ears, but her words and tone lifted a ton weight off his heart. Had he, after all, exaggerated her sufferings? Were the cynics right, and broken hearts a myth?

How could he know that that hollow laugh of Bertha's was born in a woman's scorn for the coppers of pity when she had asked for the gold of love?

XXI

LOWDERMILK TIDD came up to the office half an hour later, and announced with a chuckle, after closing the door to Bertha's room, that the committee had confirmed Davenport's choice without a dissenting vote. Hayford himself, after Davenport's threat, had been whipped into line. Thus the incident was closed. Josephine heard of the fight in the committee-room, but only vaguely, and Davenport easily answered her questions about it.

That other incident, between him and Bertha, seemed to be as good as closed, too. Bertha was acting sensibly about it, and he was profoundly grateful. Why could not women always act according to reason? Ugly misgivings, to be sure, still occasionally showed their heads in his breast, but more and more rarely as the days went by and Bertha gave no further signs of suffering.

His intercourse with Josephine took on new life. He cut the tether from his heart, and let it graze where it would. It fattened rapidly on the sweet, juicy grass of this new pasture, and was all unconscious that another heart was growing weaker and thinner—starving—on the arid table-land of unrequited love.

It received a revelation, though, before long. Davenport had been invited to a wedding in the country, and had asked Josephine to go with him.

"But I am not invited," she objected, at once.

"Yes, you are. *I* invite you. These affairs are wonderfully informal, and they will be flattered to have you

The Pride of Tellfair

there. I assure you that anybody I take out will be an honored guest. You don't know how big a man I am, outside the village limits. I want you to go and see the collection of vehicles in the barn-yard—you will think you are in the transportation department of a museum. Then there will be quaint old grandmothers there in the styles of half a century ago; and little old spinsters, with curls in front of their ears, who are positively to be seen at no other place except in their own stuffy little parlors in some farm-house off on a side road, where you will never get. There will be twenty kinds of cake, and twenty farmer boys or more who will eat a big piece of each kind, without a twinge of indigestion. You mustn't miss it."

"I should love to go," said Josephine, "but have you forgotten that this is Bertha's lesson day?"

"I had, but I'll ask her to let you off."

"I don't like to do that," said she, slowly. "It isn't business, as you are always saying."

"No, it isn't; but Bertha is in the family, so to speak, and doesn't count. It is a quarter of eleven now, and the wedding is at twelve. It's ten miles out there, and I own the only horse in town that can get us there on time. I shall be back in ten minutes. Can you be ready by then? You needn't dress, you know," he added, glancing at her neat gown.

"Much you know about it," said she, scoutingly. "But I shall be ready."

Davenport dashed back to the office, and bounded up the stairs two steps at a time.

"Bertha, there is going to be an old-fashioned country wedding out at Duckwall's to-day, and I want Miss Priestley to see it. Would you just as soon let her off from your lesson this afternoon?"

Something about him—his hurried, breathless manner, perhaps, which was merely the result of his run up

The Pride of Tellfair

the stairs, but which it was easy to mistake for eagerness—fell like a handful of powder upon the smoldering fire within Bertha's breast, and it leaped up in a fierce, white flash.

"Yes, and from every lesson hereafter," she burst out, passionately.

Had she flung her inkstand at Davenport he could hardly have been more surprised.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I mean that I will take no more lessons of her."

"Because she asks you to let her off to-day?" he asked, incredulously.

"No. Because I hate her! Because I choke every time I stand in her presence, and the only thing she is teaching me is to snarl like a cur!"

Davenport eyed her in amazement, backed by rising wrath.

"Bertha, this is monstrous. What has she ever done to you?"

"She's a *thief*!" blurted out Bertha. "She has stolen you from me. Not as a lover. I never accepted you as a lover," she added, with proudly swelling nostrils, "though you seem to have been afraid that I had. But as a friend. You don't take any pleasure in talking to me any more. You never take me riding. You never call at the house. You are not even easy with me any more. You are afraid to be seen with me on the street, and I don't want you to pay for my music lessons any more."

"Then you know that I have been paying for your lessons?"

"Yes. Mamma told me, to make me take them, so as not to offend you," she answered, scornfully.

"And this is how you show your gratitude?"

Her pretty, baby lips quivered under the shaft, her quick anger gone. Leaning her head on her hand, she

The Pride of Tellfair

tried to look out of the window, while her chin worked nervously. She was in a high state of excitement, and the picture was a touching one. After a short, sharp struggle with his pride, Davenport approached her.

"I am afraid we have both been hasty. I have made you unhappy, and you have spoiled the afternoon for me. But let us not part in anger. Will you shake hands?"

She did not answer or move.

"Won't you, please?" he repeated.

Still she did not move, and he ventured to touch the hand nearest him, the one supporting her head. The result was disastrous. She suddenly hid her face upon the table, with a wild little cry, and broke into a series of heart-rending sobs. Davenport stood helplessly by. His nerve was famous, but as one convulsion after another swept over her, like agitated seas, the sweat gathered on his forehead.

"Don't cry so loud, Bertha, please don't cry so loud!" he pleaded. "They will hear you on the street."

He closed the windows and turned the key in the door. Then, scarcely conscious of what he was doing, he began to stroke her hair.

After a few minutes, though it seemed much longer, she became much calmer, and finally quiet. She wiped her eyes, and, with her face still averted, said, huskily:

"You'd better go now; you'll be late."

"Give me your hand first, to show that you forgive me."

"I would rather not," she murmured, in a voice still moist and tremulous. But when he took her hand she made no attempt to withdraw it.

"Good-bye!" he called from the door.

"Good-bye!" she answered, wearily.

He went down the stairs as happy as a man on his way to the gallows. It was a quarter-past eleven—twenty

The Pride of Tellfair

minutes late—when he reached the Priestley house again, and Josephine was waiting on the sidewalk, in the shade.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but I was unavoidably detained. We'll get there in time yet. These things never come off on the hour."

His matter-of-fact tone gave Josephine no inkling of the truth, but they had not gone far before she discovered an absent-mindedness in him. He labored like a young giant to throw it off, and would succeed for the moment; but it stole back upon him each time, un-awares.

They reached the farm-house with time to spare, as Davenport had predicted. They saw the farmers, in rusty, dusty black, standing around in the door-yard or squatting on the porch and steps, whittling, or manicuring their toil-torn nails. They saw the women sitting inside, plying their fans in almost funereal silence. When all was ready, they saw the bride and her sunburned groom, with best man and maid behind, come bouncing down the narrow, crooked flight of stairs to the whining wedding-march of the cabinet-organ in the parlor. They also saw the ancient spinsters and the quaint grandmothers, the twenty cakes, and the twenty farmer boys who ate a piece of each.

But Davenport's usual running fire of comment was absent, and during the simple ceremony he was unduly solemn. He seemed to know everybody, men and women, and had a word for them all. But Josephine saw that he was forcing himself. Something had plainly gone wrong in the half-hour he had been delayed at the office; and though it might only have been one of his multifarious business affairs, she could not rid herself of the fear that it was Bertha. It was on account of this, perhaps, that she did not mention the girl's name until Davenport had helped her down from the buggy, at her gate.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Tell Bertha, please," she said, "that if it is convenient for her, I can give her a lesson at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

When Davenport reached his office, he found it locked, and a typewritten letter from Bertha on his desk.

"DEAR MORRIS,—I don't feel very well, and I am going home. I am sorrier than I can say for what happened to-day. I have been thinking about it ever since you left, and crying. I *am* grateful, Morris, for the music lessons, deeply grateful, and for all your other kindnesses, although I still think that I have not improved under Miss Priestley as I should have under another teacher, and for the reason I gave to-day.

"Perhaps I did her an injustice, too. She has been very kind to me, and I wish I could feel the same towards her. I am going to try, and, if you really want to pay for my lessons any longer, I will continue to take them.

"As to your being unkind to me, I said more than I meant to-day. I hope you can forgive me. If you do, I shall know it by your actions. Please do not tell me that you do, or mention the matter again. I cannot bear to talk about it.

Sincerely,

"BERTHA."

XXII

BERTHA looked as fresh the next morning as if no wave of trouble had ever crossed her breast. Her appearance strengthened Davenport's belief that she was too superficial to suffer long or deeply from anything, or even to love deeply.

This belief, however, had suffered several rude shocks, and it was destined to suffer a still ruder one. He sat one evening on the side porch with the Priestley sisters until after ten o'clock. Victoria, who was a discerning as well as an accommodating little maiden, had then declared that she was too sleepy to sit up another minute, and had gone in. Davenport lingered with Josephine, thoughtless of the hour, until the church clock tolled eleven.

Josephine's face was not one which shrank from the glare of day, but in the starlight it was enchantingly beautiful. Her dark eyes gleamed like the bosom of a glassy, phosphorescent sea; and her low contralto voice struck Davenport as the sweetest music he had ever heard.

A peculiar, almost painful, hollowness arose in his throat. He ceased to talk; he almost ceased to listen, except to her matchless intonations. He was vaguely conscious only that she was talking about her mother's old home in France, and he had a wild notion that when she was done he should ask her to become his wife. It would startle her, he was sure; it might even repel her. But he would take the chance.

The Pride of Tellfair

Some subtle agency seemed to warn her, for she became silent. Then, at the very instant the momentous words were slipping to the tip of his venturesome tongue, she turned slightly and said, so softly, so familiarly, with such a winning assumption of the perfect understanding between them:

"You must go home, Mr. Davenport. It is after eleven."

It drove the words from his lips, but they merely retired to his heart again, to bide their time.

As he passed out of the gate, a dark object suddenly started from the shadow of a tree, flitted across the street, and vanished in the bank of gloom under the thick foliage. Burglars were practically unknown in the village, but an occasional tramp spent the night there, sometimes to the detriment of clothes-lines, hammocks, and other appurtenances of the yard.

Most Tellfairians—including the night-watchmen, it was hinted—were content to give these stray members of the unshaven brotherhood a wide berth after dark. But Davenport was not. His pugnacity was now instantly aroused, and he paused to catch by ear the direction of the fleeing prowler. Hearing nothing, he stepped into the grass, where his own footfalls were noiseless, and moved stealthily along, straining his eyes and ears across the dark street. He neither saw nor heard anything, though, until he reached the corner. There, by the aid of a street-lamp a block away, he glimpsed a figure scudding along between the tree-trunks.

His curiosity, not to say suspicion, was aroused, and he instantly gave pursuit. His unknown game set a good pace. After circling the block once, and turning a number of corners, in the hope, evidently, of losing his pursuer, the tramp or burglar, or whoever it was, turned down an alley, came out at the other end, cut diagonally

The Pride of Tellfair

across the court-house square, and doubled back along one side of it. He followed this street until the houses became sparse on one side, and on the other ceased altogether and gave way to corn-fields. He then turned down a lane, followed the next street—or road—back to the village, and finally reached the park again.

The pair had now made a circuit of perhaps a mile, and Davenport was blowing like a porpoise. After all, he reflected, he might be running down only a harum-scarum boy, for he had not yet got a good look at his game, having followed more by sound than sight. He was, therefore, on the verge of abandoning the chase when the figure ahead, who had heretofore avoided the light as much as possible, apparently grew desperate and turned into a street which would bring him directly under the lamp in front of Dr. Burney's house. Davenport determined to hold out long enough, at least, to see what manner of person he had been following. Twenty seconds later, as the object of his pursuit came between him and the light, he saw, to his amazement, that it wore skirts—that it was, in short, a woman.

He came to a sudden halt. At the same moment the woman, who had thus far shown remarkable endurance, also stopped, staggered over to Dr. Burney's fence, and clung to the pickets for support. She rested only a few seconds, though, and then moved unsteadily on, directly into the circle of light.

Davenport emitted a cry of pain and amazement. The woman was Bertha Congreve! She paused, as if she had heard his cry—though that was scarcely possible—turned half-way round, with a reeling motion, like a drunken person, and then sank gently to the sidewalk in a senseless heap.

Davenport tenderly lifted the limp form—how light it was!—and for a moment stood still and held it in his arms. His first thought was to arouse Dr. Burney.

The Pride of Tellfair

His next and more cautious one was to carry her to the horse-trough across the street and revive her himself. The possibility of some belated person, though, stumbling upon them there was not a pleasant thought, and he concluded that the safest plan would be to take her home. This involved an embarrassing meeting with the girl's mother, certainly; and Bertha would be put to it, when she recovered, to explain her presence on the street at that hour. But it was the safest way out.

Bertha was light enough when he first lifted her, but before he reached the house his arms ached. He knocked gently, instead of ringing the bell, hoping not to arouse Harvey, whose room was farther back than Volley's. A moment later the door softly opened, revealing Volley in a red bath-robe corded at the waist. She was a woman not easily alarmed, as she proved by opening the door without question at that hour of the night; but the sight of her limp and white-faced daughter in the arms of a man unnerved her for a moment.

"Is she dead?" she gasped.

"No, no," answered Davenport, cheerfully. "Only fainted."

Volley was quickly herself again, and as Davenport brushed past her with his burden she said, softly, "There is no necessity for awaking Harvey. Go easy and take her into my room."

As soon as Bertha had regained consciousness and was measurably comfortable—in other words, as soon as Davenport was sure that she could *hear what he said*, he enlightened the mystified Volley a little.

"I had been up to see the Priestley girls," he said, slowly and distinctly. "As I was coming home, I saw a woman leaning against Dr. Burney's fence. I did not recognize her as Bertha until she started to move on. She seemed faint, and walked unsteadily, and just as I

The Pride of Tellfair

started towards her she sank to the sidewalk. I picked her up and brought her home. That's about all."

This was *his* story. Bertha could piece it out to suit herself, or make a clean breast of the whole affair; but he had no intention of committing her to either course.

Volley listened to this brief recital with steady, gray eyes. There might also have been a glint of incredulity in them.

"I don't understand it at all," said she, disapprovingly, if not, indeed, disbelievingly. "Bertha was to have spent the night with Carrie Stone, and how she happened to be in front of Dr. Burney's, after eleven o'clock at night, alone, and in an exhausted condition, I can't understand."

She glanced at the bed, but Bertha had discreetly closed her eyes again, and looked so weak and wan that no one would have had the heart to question her just then. Davenport ventured no hypothesis, but as he arose to go he said, still careful that Bertha should hear:

"I am not certain, but I think that some man or boy frightened her by following her, for as I came up I saw some one turn rapidly and rather stealthily into Main Street. I thought nothing of it, though, until I saw Bertha."

He took a last glance at the figure on the bed, over which Volley had thrown a gorgeous slumber-robe of barred orange and black. Under his gaze Bertha's half-lifted lids slowly sank again, as if from weariness; but he was quite sure that she was still watching him from the ambush of her long lashes.

Volley followed him to the door.

"Have you told me all you know, Morris?" she asked, insinuatingly.

"You are complimentary, I vow, to both your daughter and me."

The Pride of Tellfair

"I don't think I had better say anything to Harvey about this," she answered, coolly.

"I should advise you to tell him all about it," he said, dryly.

"If I don't, I suppose you will."

"I am quite likely to."

"Then I'll tell him myself. Why haven't you been around lately? Afraid of me, on account of that Ceres business?" She laughed unpleasantly.

"Oh no. I knew you understood my attitude, and didn't care how it went, anyhow," he answered, with caressing irony, and bade her good-night.

XXIII

HE went to his rooms, but not to bed. That moment when Bertha reeled out into the light, with a terrified glance behind, and sank to the ground, repeated itself again and again to him, like a stubborn nightmare. But after a while his imagination extended the picture, and he could see her skulking in the darkness before Josephine's home, like a thief, eaten by jealousy, trying for a glimpse of him and Josephine, and holding her breath for an incautious word. It was squalid, revolting. But it was also desperately pathetic. Then he quietly asked himself, with a stiffness around his lips, if the blood of this woman's outraged modesty was on his hands. The next moment he hooted the thought, but it circled wearily through his brain all night long, in his dreams.

In the morning the affair had lost much of its tragedy, but it was still an exceedingly ugly memory to begin the day with. Bertha did not appear at the office, for which he was glad. He hoped no clients would appear, either. About four o'clock, after a restless day, he walked into Feversham's drug-store and bought a cigar.

"Come back here, Tom," said he. "I want to talk to you."

Feversham was a man past fifty, nearly bald, with a large, oval, mobile face, and a soft, womanish, brown eye. He was not rich; he belonged to no religious, social, or fraternal organization; he held no political office. Yet he was regarded as one of the solid citizens

The Pride of Tellfair

of Tellfair. His opinion was always sought in matters concerning the public welfare. He was reputed the best-read man in town, and was a walking encyclopædia for people who owned no other kind. With local disputants, who made a forum of his store, he was a court of highest appeal, and many a wager had been settled by him.

As might be guessed, he was quiet and unassuming. Unless appealed to, he would let the village wiseacres wrangle by the hour in his presence without opening his lips. Yet, when he spoke, his opinion was rendered in no uncertain language, and he cared not whom he hit. Naturally, his enemies were neither few nor lukewarm; but, on the whole, he was a popular man without having ever turned his hand over to win popularity. Few people, though, even among his friends, suspected the tenderness which lay beneath his rather cold exterior. Davenport was one of the few, and for years the two had been bosom companions.

Feversham took a cigar for himself also, and followed Davenport to the rear of the store, in front of the prescription-case, where a number of chairs were scattered about to accommodate the tired, the social, and the disputatious—and now and then a customer.

"Tom, some time ago you were bold enough to warn me that Bertha Congreve might come to think too much of me," said Morris, frankly, after a puff or two.

Feversham waited, mirroring the speaker in his limpid eyes.

"I didn't pay much attention then—first, because I didn't believe it; secondly, because I fancied I was getting to think a good deal of *her*."

Feversham still waited. His unwavering glance would have disconcerted some people; but Davenport knew him, and it was a luxury to state his case slowly and at length, without fear of interruption or snap judgment.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Believing this, I saw no harm in letting things drift. But, understand, I didn't see how I could stop them, even had I feared harm. You know my relations with the family, and you know that she is in my office because the family needs her wages. I now believe that you were right, Tom. She *does* think a good deal of me, and I have discovered that I don't think as much of her as I thought. Now to what class of knaves would you assign me? Or would you simply label me a fool?"

"How do you know that she loves you?" asked Feversham, not at all startled by Davenport's revelation—somewhat to the young man's relief.

Davenport gave him a detailed account of certain incidents, ending with the one of the night before.

"The evidence certainly favors your conclusion," said Feversham, with grim humor.

"I don't want you to think me unduly sentimental, Tom," continued Davenport, "but I think the situation is grave. I am of the opinion that Bertha has grown thin and pale over this matter, though I wouldn't have believed her capable of it once. Women have wrecked their lives before on this rock. I don't believe Bertha is going to do that. Sometimes I don't believe it is even going to make her unhappy long. But I can't escape a sense of guilt. I let things drift when I suspected she was learning to love me, and because I felt that I was learning to love her. I think yet that I was right, in part. If a man flies from a woman just because he doesn't love her, how will he ever learn to love her? At the same time, when the venture miscarries, the woman has to suffer."

"Unless the man happens to resemble a fellow I know out in Kansas. He was courting his present wife in the same experimental way you adopted. He decided in the course of time that she wasn't the one woman in the world for him—just as you have. So he started to

The Pride of Tellfair

crawfish, very cautiously. He began by reducing his calls from seven a week to six, joining a lodge for an excuse. She pouted, cried, and finally fainted. At least he thought she did, for she grew very white, closed her eyes, and did not answer when he spoke. So he gave that plan up, and tried another. He gave up all his playful attentions and became strictly impersonal in his calls. He talked nothing but letters and art, politics, history, and foreign happenings—all of which she knew nothing about. In short, he tried to bore her love to death. It was a dismal failure. She would sit and listen to him for hours, or drowse in his arms. Therefore, being a man who dislikes a fuss of any kind and can't bear to see people suffer, he married her as the easiest way out. They have three children now, and, so far as I know, are leading an average married life."

Davenport eyed the narrator furtively through a cloud of smoke. There was an elusive gleam in the druggist's eye, but no one could have said positively that he was joking. Davenport was of the opinion that he was not.

"I suppose some men in my place would marry Bertha?"

"That man from Kansas would."

"He's a weak man."

"Yes. Weak, with good intentions."

"What would a strong man with good intentions do?" asked Davenport.

"That's what I am waiting to see," said Feversham. "Then I shall have Story No. 2 to tell." He added, seriously, "He would first get her out of his office."

"I can't do it," said Davenport, promptly. "It would be cruel. She would know at once what it meant, and it looks underhand to me. In the second place, the family needs her wages, as I said. I have thought that course over from every side, and it won't do, Tom."

"It would be a cruelty that in the end would prove

The Pride of Tellfair

a mercy," said Feversham, bluntly. "As long as she sees you every day, and all day, the same influences that have drawn her to you will hold her to you. Kennel a dog and cat together long enough, and they'll suffer if you separate them."

"But suppose I take a different attitude towards her?"

"Like the Kansas man?" asked Feversham, astutely. "You might try it. A woman is a mystery to me. If you are kind to her, she will love you; if you are unkind, she will love you more. That goes to show that the man has nothing more to do with her love than a wall has with the growth of an ivy. Love is a necessity of her being, and love she will—happily if she can, unhappily rather than not at all."

"Your reflections are of a cheerful nature for a man in my fix," observed Davenport, dryly.

"You can try your plan."

"I have tried it, to be honest," answered Morris. "For weeks I have come down to my office like an oyster in his shell. I am not unkind, but I withhold a hundred little courtesies every day, and pleasantries, that I should be glad to show her if she wouldn't misinterpret them. Every time I call on Josephine Priestley I take pains to let her know it. But it makes no difference. She treats me differently, of course, but I can see that she doesn't feel different. I have hopes, though, that in time she will—that I may wear her love out."

"You may," said Feversham, hopefully.

"Yet I doubt it. When I consider how superficial she is in most respects, I am amazed at her constancy in this matter. And when I consider that she is a daughter of Volley Congreve, who would tire, I think, of the best man on earth in ninety days, to say nothing of one who habitually mistreated her, I am—well, I am nonplussed."

"That's just the one kind of man that Volley would *not* tire of," answered Feversham, wisely. "If she had

The Pride of Tellfair

married a prize-fighter who would have occasionally used her for a punching-bag, she would have loved him to the end. That is the nature of that breed of creatures, and Bertha is her mother's child. At the same time," he added, more kindly, "it is well to remember that she is also Harvey's child, and Harvey was never much of a forgetter, you know, except of injuries."

A woman entered the store, and Feversham went forward to wait on her. Davenport also strolled forward and leaned preoccupiedly against the counter. When the customer had gone, Feversham continued:

"Let things rock along a little, Morris. Be true to yourself and honest with her, and the affair will adjust itself. It may take time. You are in a tight place, beyond a doubt, for an honorable man; but I see nothing for you to do at present except to stay there and sweat. You may lubricate yourself sufficiently in that way to slip out," he added, grinning. "Still, I wish you could get her out of the office, for both your sakes. Think that over again."

Davenport returned to his office with the repugnance for it which a man feels for a sleepless bed. He wanted to get Bertha out of his mind, and everything about his office put her in his mind. As he dropped down dispiritedly at his desk, he started at sight of an envelope addressed to him in Bertha's handwriting. It had evidently been left in his absence. He dreaded to open it, for he had a premonition that it was going to force a crisis. Slowly and reluctantly, however, he slit it with a paper-knife, and with a downcast face began the perusal of the letter inside.

Suddenly he brought the paper down on the desk with a resounding thwack, folded his arms, and looked around the room with the air of a man who had been given a new lease of life.

"Thank God for that!" he said, aloud, fervently and

The Pride of Tellfair

distinctly. Then he took the letter up and read it through again.

"DEAR MORRIS,—I feel so badly over the terrible mistake of last night that I must write to you and explain, though I am still in bed. I can't let you remain any longer under the impression that I am as shameless as you must now think me.

"I was to spend last night with Carrie Stone, but about half-past ten, or a little before, I began to feel so sick that I felt I ought to go home, in case I should get worse. I think it was the heat, Carrie wanted her father to go with me, but I knew he had gone to bed, and I told her I wasn't afraid. It was such a beautiful night that, instead of going straight home, I walked around a little, feeling that it would do me good.

"Finally I found myself in front of Miss Priestley's. I supposed they were all in bed, and when you stepped out of the gate at just that moment it frightened me terribly until I recognized you. Then I thought, 'He will think it strange of me to be out alone so late.' I thought, too, that you might think I was *spying* on you. So I stepped behind a tree to let you pass. But at the last moment I dared not take the chance of being seen, so I foolishly ran. You know the rest.

"I have suffered so all day, to have you think, as I know you must, that I had so far lost my self-respect as to spy on you. But certainly there would be no satisfaction in such a thing to me, even if I had no scruples to restrain me. Please say nothing of this to mamma. After what you told her last night, I could not very well tell her the truth, but it is just as well. So please be careful.

"Sincerely,
"BERTHA."

XXIV

BERTHA had intended, as she said in her letter, to spend the night with her bosom friend, Carrie Stone. In the afternoon, Davenport had casually mentioned, in accordance with his "weaning" plan, that he intended to call on Miss Priestley that evening. He had been calling there so frequently of late that the remark did not disturb Bertha much at the time. She was acquiring a kind of resignation. But as she sat on the Stones' spacious porch that night with Carrie, the starry silence and the fragrant summer air, together with the thought that Morris was with Josephine instead of with her, induced a melancholy mood.

"Cheer up!" said Carrie, after a long silence.

But Bertha could not cheer up, and after a little Carrie asked her what the trouble was. Bertha would have loved to tell her, but scarcely dared; so she answered that she was not well.

As the evening advanced, she grew restless. Her fancy conjured up visions of Davenport and Miss Priestley, now sitting on the porch, now strolling under the trees, now dallying over light refreshments, but always in a state of serene enjoyment. She could almost hear Josephine's low, mellow laughter as Davenport related some of the stories or experiences of which he was full. Or—her fancy growing reckless—she could see Josephine's head inclining modestly lower and Morris bending nearer, murmuring—what?

A prey to these harrowing thoughts, Bertha became

The Pride of Tellfair

fairly feverish. Davenport would naturally pass the Stone home in returning to his lodgings, and she started at every footfall in the direction of the Priestleys'. She was glad, in a way, that she was with Carrie instead of at home. She wanted to see Davenport go by, she wanted to know when he left Josephine. But as it grew late and he did not come, she conceived an intense desire to know certainly whether he was really prolonging his visit thus or had gone home another way. It was on the tip of her tongue half a dozen times to suggest to Carrie that they take a walk, which she would see should take them past the Priestleys'. But each time her guilty conscience made her afraid.

"Carrie," said she, abruptly. "I am going home. I feel worse, and I might get sick in the night."

Carrie looked at her friend in astonishment.

"Why, Bert, are you really sick? Let mamma fix you something to take."

"No," said Bertha, firmly, as she arose. "I'll go home." Nothing could have held her now.

"What's the matter with you?"

"I don't know," answered Bertha, desperately, by this time half believing her own pretence. "I haven't been well all day. I feel so shaky and queer."

"Why, you *are* feverish!" exclaimed Carrie, as she touched Bertha's hot hand. "Wait till I get papa, and we'll walk home with you."

"No," said Bertha, decisively. "He is probably in bed by this time, and I am not afraid. Good-bye. I'll be all right in the morning."

"You sha'n't go alone," protested Carrie, turning towards the door to call her father.

"Carrie," said Bertha, sternly, "if you go after your father I shall run away while you are gone. I am not a bit more afraid to go home alone than I am to cross this porch, and I won't let you disturb him. Good-bye."

The Pride of Tellfair

And before Carrie could remonstrate further her guest had gone, leaving her night-gown and tooth-brush, wrapped in a paper, behind.

Bertha started towards home, but at the next corner she crossed the street and made her way swiftly back towards the Priestley home, two blocks farther up the street. She repassed the Stone house without fear, for even if Carrie were still on the porch, which was unlikely, it would be impossible for her to recognize any one across the street.

Bertha drew a breath of relief at a light up-stairs in the Priestley house. The girls were evidently going to bed. But, to satisfy herself, she crossed the street and paused in front of the house. All was as still as a graveyard, and the tumult in her jealous little bosom began to die away. Davenport had probably gone home long before—as early, perhaps, as he used to leave *her* house.

But as she turned away, low voices on the side porch suddenly arrested her steps. Stepping forward almost fiercely to where she could enfilade the porch with her eyes, she made out two blurred figures in the darkness.

She stood there for what seemed hours and watched those two dark spots as a castaway might watch a distant patch of sail, as a gaunt cat might watch a rat, holding her breath and almost her pulse to catch one word, even though that word might pierce her heart, starting fearfully at every sound, remote or near, the hot blood leaping to her face and neck at the slightest movement of the two shadows. Meanwhile, she felt her self-respect, her modesty, her honor, oozing away, and did not care. The blood of her mother was up in her.

At last she saw the figures rise, heard their low good-nights, and saw Davenport coming down the gravelled walk. Still she stood like one in a trance. It was only when he stepped through the gate that she awoke and felt the shame of her position. Fear pinned her to the

The Pride of Tellfair

spot for an instant. Then, panic-stricken, she broke and ran, knowing that she must be seen, but hoping to escape unrecognized in the dark.

Whither she fled she scarcely knew. But with the instinct of the hunted beast, for she heard her pursuer behind, she shunned the street-lamps, dodged corners, and doubled on her trail like a hare. Then, weary unto death, after making that long circuit which nearly wind-ed Davenport himself, too weak to cross the street again to avoid the lamp ahead, too desperate to care, she seized Dr. Burney's pickets to keep from falling, closed her eyes, and, like a drowning man whose force is spent, resigned herself to fate. All that followed was a dream until she awoke in her bed, with her mother bending over her, Davenport not far away, and the odor of hartshorn in her nose.

She awoke late the next morning to find that she had slept soundly all night, to her great surprise. A delightful languor pervaded every fibre of her body. The lifting of her lids gave her a pleasurable sense of physical exercise, and was as much as she cared to attempt.

In this enervated state the events of the night before—her degradation and the certain loss of Davenport's respect—were of little moment. She actually smiled. Even death itself, of which she was usually unwholesomely afraid, had no terrors for her. Indeed, she fancied it would be rather a fine thing to die now, especially if she could thus make Davenport regret his cruelty to her the rest of his life.

But some hot broth made her blood move again, and the things of this world—love, remorse, dishonor—loomed once more in their normal proportions. The old heartache came back. A rage of shame and self-scorn took possession of her; and, when she told Davenport in her letter that she had suffered, she spoke only the truth.

The Pride of Tellfair

The work of the night before must be undone at any cost, she felt, and that cost was a lie—a bold, unblushing, elaborate, artful lie. Yet this did not strike her as an extortionate price. She was getting off rather lightly, she fancied. But when the letter had been despatched by a neighbor's little girl, she solemnly vowed that it should be the last lie of her life, and the work of the night before the last shameful act of her life.

There was a melancholy pleasure in the thought of living a noble, blameless life henceforth for the sake of him she loved, though he did not love her. There was a fascination, also, for her melodramatic mind, in the idea of fading away under Davenport's neglect, provided only that he should know why she faded. She was not just serious in this, perhaps, but neither was she simply amusing herself. She really had an idea that she might die of a broken heart, and she knew that she was losing flesh. It rather pleased her, therefore, after she was out again, in a day or two, when people noted her falling off; and she always responded to their inquiries as sweetly and patiently as she knew how, yet looking as wan and ethereal as possible.

When her mother suggested, a few days later, that she go and consult Dr. Burney, she went with alacrity. Without really meaning to do so, she completely hoodwinked that kind-hearted, incompetent old practitioner, and rather alarmed him. Her malady, however, mystified him. He therefore promptly pronounced it general debility—a safe and convenient diagnosis, and one that could later be merged into something more specific.

But while this diagnosis satisfied the girl and her parents, it did not satisfy the doctor himself. Professionally, Nathan Burney had fossilized thirty years before. In that period few if any drops of new knowledge had filtered into his brain from the brimming reservoir of scientific discovery. But his conscience was as tender

The Pride of Tellfair

as ever, and it gave him no rest in this case until he one day astounded Harvey Congreve by telling him, with all the solemnity and delicacy befitting such a communication, that his daughter was suffering from unrequited love.

No acuteness of the old doctor's, however, had led him to this startling discovery. Indeed, so far from being able to follow the subtle, sinuous trail of a diseased mind, the trail of a diseased body was often none too plain for his purblind eyes. In at least two instances he had diagnosed diphtheria as quinsy, and had complacently prescribed for the latter until the true disease, like a band of busy sappers working under cover of the night, had intrenched itself beyond dislodgment.

The truth was, the doctor had stumbled upon his discovery. Dropping into Feversham's drug-store one afternoon for his customary five-cent cigar, of which he allowed himself one a day, he confided his perplexity over Bertha's case to Tom. Tom had been studying Bertha's case himself, and it flashed over him that here was the golden opportunity, without betraying anybody's confidence or giving anybody undue pain, to cut at least one of the strands of Davenport's bond.

"Have you analyzed the air in Davenport's office?" he asked.

The old gentleman blinked uncomprehendingly.

"I think the air in Davenport's office disagrees with Bertha," added Feversham, a shade more plainly.

"Why, there can be nothing wrong with that air," answered Burney, still in perplexity. "Davenport's health is of the best. Do you mean her close confinement?"

"Yes—her close confinement with Davenport."

Feversham's look was so significant that the cloud of mystification slowly lifted from Dr. Burney's little, wizened face, and his blue eyes opened as wide as a child's.

"Do you mean that she *loves* him?" he whispered.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I might mean that," answered Feversham; "though, mind you, I only said that the air was bad."

Dr. Burney carried this momentous secret in his bosom, on his daily rounds, for a week or more, without knowing just what to do with it or what change to make in his prescriptions. Then, as it grew heavier and heavier, he shifted it, with many misgivings, and yet with a sigh of relief, to Harvey Congreve.

Harvey was at first incredulous, even indignant. But as Dr. Burney nervously pointed out, the evidence was before him in Bertha's languor, loss of appetite, sadness, and fits of abstraction. Harvey recalled, too, that Davenport had not been coming to the house as often of late. The significance of this had never occurred to him before, for in his eyes his daughter was yet a child. But, with his usual magnanimity, he at once absolved Davenport from blame. It was simply one of those unfortunate occurrences, he reflected, for which no one in particular is responsible.

He said nothing to Volley for a week. At the end of that time he was convinced that Dr. Burney was right. Calling his wife into his study one afternoon, he told her briefly what the doctor had said. There was a time when he would have made a communication of this nature with his arm around her waist or his lips upon her cheek; but that time had gone, never to return, and she now stood half the width of the room away.

She took the revelation very tamely. Yet a subtle change did take place in her. After an instantaneous gleam, her big, gray eyes grew studiously lazy and dull, in a characteristic yet quite indescribable manner, but just as if she were drawing a thin curtain over the windows of her soul while leaving the shutters open. A very keen observer would have looked for some trickery to follow. Yet what trickery could follow, anybody would have been puzzled to say.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Do you believe it?" she asked.

"Something is wrong with the child."

"She is merely out of sorts."

"She is more than out of sorts," answered Harvey. "She has been ailing for three months, and I don't mind saying now that I have been alarmed. Since Dr. Burney told me this, I have watched her carefully, and I believe he is right."

"Then Morris Davenport has been tampering with her," said she, with a gust of spite. She had been nursing a hostility against him ever since the Ceres matter. His participation in Bertha's mysterious night adventure had added to it. This last fanned it into flame.

"You have no right to make such a grave charge off-hand," said her husband, sternly.

Volley turned on her heel into the bay-window and glanced out. She stood there for some time, crushing between her fingers, leaf by leaf, a branch of the magnificent sword-fern which hung from the ceiling. The destruction may have been unconscious, it may have been spiteful. She had no love for flowers. Those in the house were Harvey's, and too often he had to carry water himself from the kitchen to keep them from perishing. But if the destruction was unconscious, what followed was not, for she carefully dropped the mangled leaves behind a flower-stand, out of sight.

"No, I suppose I have no right," she answered, sullenly, at last. "I suppose, of course, it is all Bertha's fault. It always is the woman's—poor fool! What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know. Dr. Burney suggested that we take her out of the office for a while."

"Did he suggest where our bread-and-butter would come from meanwhile?"

"We certainly ought to be willing to make that much

The Pride of Tellfair

of a sacrifice for our child. We can live, with a little economy, without her wages until she can secure another place."

"I deny it," said she, angrily. "We can't live. We can simply exist. Besides, where is there another place in this town that a girl can earn ten dollars a week in?"

"Not ten, perhaps, but six or eight."

"What excuse will you make to her for taking her out of the office? Tell her that we know she's in love with a man who doesn't love her, and crush her pride forever?"

"Certainly not. We'll simply tell her that her health demands a rest."

"When she is rested, what excuse will you make for not letting her go back to Davenport again?"

"I fancy she won't want to go back to him," answered Harvey.

"What about *him*?"

"If he doesn't suspect our motive in taking her away, and wants her back, I shall tell him the truth. I don't know of any one, outside the family, that I could tell it to more easily. But I think he probably knows it now."

"Yes, I think it very likely," she retorted.

It was finally agreed between them to take no immediate action. Bertha had apparently felt a little better for the last day or two. Perhaps the problem was solving itself.

XXV

THE great annual event in Tellfair was the County Fair. During these four days the village lived longer and took in more money than during any other four weeks of the year. Reduced railroad rates combed the country for forty miles about. Every morning long trains brought in their human freight, and every evening carried it away again. Every morning, also, a long line of vehicles wound towards the town on every road, leaving behind a choking cloud of dust, visible across the level prairie for miles. By eight o'clock every barn and shed, every vacant lot and pasture within the village limits, were filled with horses, wagons, and buggies.

In addition to these transients, who brought their lunches or bought only one meal in town, there was a host to be taken care of at night as well, and fed throughout the week. By the second day of the fair the Basley House was filled to overflowing. Exhibitors, stockmen, visitors from a distance, jockeys, fakirs, and farmers jostled one another in office and dining-room. The halls were packed with cots, like a field-hospital; and even the hard office-chairs were not infrequently occupied throughout a long, torturous night by unfortunate late-comers. Spare rooms in private houses were thrown open, and boarding-house tables were swelled out of all proportion to the facilities of the kitchen.

Each of the churches had a "tent," as the wooden structure was called, on the fair-grounds, where the hungry were fed at all hours—though not without

The Pride of Tellfair

price. During this week, all other forms of church activity were suspended, even sermon-making; and here pastor and people spent their time in turning a few honest dollars for the cause. Each tent proclaimed its denomination in letters not to be overlooked, and one could begin the day with a Presbyterian breakfast, stay himself at noon with a Methodist dinner, and recuperate at night with a Baptist supper, to say nothing of undenominational lunches in between.

Davenport showed Josephine about on the first day. He led her down the long stock-sheds, where she saw, in all their pride of blood, the best horses, cattle, sheep, and hogs which the county produced. He knew the names of the endless breeds of each. He pointed out a Holstein cow which gave seventy pounds of milk a day, and explained that this was equal to thirty-five quarts. He showed her a white steer which stood six feet high and weighed thirty-three hundred pounds, although it was far from fat, and was reputed to be the biggest steer in the world.

The advantages of such an escort were obvious. Farmers led out their fancy calves at his approach, punched their great, unwieldy bulls to their feet—while Josephine shuddered for the daring men's lives—and gave Davenport and her a thousand facts of interest about their charges which a casual visitor would never have learned.

It was the same everywhere they went. When they stopped at a stand for some lemonade, the vender pushed back Davenport's quarter and said, smilingly, "The president's money is no good here." They saw the Wild Girl of Australia free of charge, and learned confidentially from the showman, besides, that she was merely an idiot from a neighboring county, with her face walnut-stained. They rode for nothing on the merry-go-round, and the owner of the Ocean Wave begged the favor of their

The Pride of Tellfair

presence for at least one voyage, but Josephine was afraid it would make her dizzy. They heard the Georgia Minstrels—straight from South State Street, in Chicago.

One tent, though, with a great painted canvas in front, labelled "Venus Rising from the Wave," they passed by.

"I am going to investigate that attraction by myself as soon as I get through with you," said Davenport. "It has been complained of as immoral. I don't suppose it is—at least, not glaringly so—for these fellows are pretty shrewd about keeping within the law; but if I think it is too strong meat for those boys I'll close the place up."

In Poultry Hall they saw tiers of cages containing ducks, chickens, turkeys, geese, guinea-fowls, and pigeons. The place was a foretaste of pandemonium in the way of noise, and worse in the way of odors, and their stay was brief. In another building were heaps of glossy, red-cheeked apples, luscious grapes, giant pumpkins and squashes, corn-stalks ten feet high, ears of the same of incredible size, and measures of grains and seeds through which the farmers lovingly ran their calloused fingers. At one end of the building a throng of housewives elbowed each other about cheerfully and gazed with rapt eyes at golden rolls of butter, great cheeses, and rows of canned fruit—a display to make one's mouth water.

Next Davenport took her to see the machinery. Big, red threshing-machines, driven by traction-engines, were at work; corn-shredders and feed-cutters voraciously swallowed whatever was fed them, and viciously clicked their iron teeth for more. Gasolene engines coughed; patent churns and washing-machines pounded and rattled, and even horses were curried by steam. Indeed, with all these dumb servants, one wondered what there could be left for the farmer and his wife to

The Pride of Tellfair

do. But their bent backs and hard hands showed that there was something left.

In spite of all these exhibits, however, and balloon ascensions and snake-charmers besides, it was undeniable that the chief attraction of the fair was the races. Every year the grand-stand was enlarged; every year the purses grew bigger and the entries better and more numerous. People who would have turned their virtuous backs upon a trotting association's races sat in the grand-stand day after day, and arbitrated the matter with their consciences after the fair was over. Even the Reverend Julius Poynter, though never seen in the grand-stand itself, usually managed to be in the neighborhood of the race-track, simply to see the horses warm up.

Old Captain Dusenbury, marshal of the grounds for twenty consecutive years, and a staid, quiet citizen at all other seasons, daily spurred his stiff old clay-colored horse up and down the space in front of the judges' stand, keeping the track clear, bawling out announcements for the following day until he was red in the face, and saluting the ladies in martial style. His grandeur at this time would have been incredible to one who had only seen him spitting tobacco-juice on the stove in Tinwinkle's grocery during the winter, or placidly hoeing his garden in the spring, clad in butternut overalls.

The best local horses were Davenport's and Hayford's, of course, and they won their full share of honors against all comers, even the professionals from Chicago. In the Gentlemen's Race both Davenport and Hayford had, by the rules, to drive their own horses. It is not probable that either of them seriously objected, having made the rule themselves. Josephine, though, did not just relish the sight of Davenport on a sulky, bending over his horse's haunches, with its tail under him on the seat. It made him look too much like Bradley Hayford.

But when the horses came thundering down the

The Pride of Tellfair

stretch, Davenport and Hayford in the lead, neck and neck, and the vast assemblage arose as one man, she forgot these scruples. Nervous chills rippled up and down her spine, and when Davenport's beautiful chestnut made a tremendous final spurt and shot under the wire half a length ahead of Hayford's black, she gave a cry of exultation. The next instant she blushed furiously, for every one around her was looking and smiling.

Yet not quite everybody, for Bertha Congreve sat two or three tiers above, with a cold, tranquil face. The pallor which was now habitual with her accented her aloofness. Yet when her mother, who was openly disappointed at Hayford's defeat, murmured something to Bertha, the latter answered, in a voice audible to Josephine: "I am glad Morris won. He doesn't abuse his horses like Bradley."

Hayford did win the next two heats, however, giving him the race, although to do it he had to lash his horse mercilessly. Davenport took his defeat amiably, so far as could be seen from Josephine's place. She knew that he had set his heart on winning that race, and when he came up to her a few minutes later she curiously scanned his face for signs of chagrin. She was learning to read it, mask it as he would. Sure enough, there was a slight indirectness about his gaze, usually point-blank, and she knew that he was keenly disappointed.

"I would have given five hundred dollars to win that race," said he, regretfully. "What hurts me most is that I should have won it if Hayford hadn't fouled me on the last heat at the three-quarter post. He blocked me squarely when I was trying to pass him."

"Purposely?" asked Josephine, indignantly.

"With any other man I might have thought it an accident. But I know Hayford too well."

"Why didn't you complain to the judges?"

Davenport shrugged his shoulders.

The Pride of Tellfair

"They couldn't have seen it, and it would have looked too much like a baby act. Hayford had considerable money on the race, and wanted to win badly."

"Did you have any money on it?" she asked.

"A trifle."

"How much of a trifle?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"But I want you to speak of it."

"Two hundred dollars," he answered.

She fell into a thoughtful silence.

"I don't believe you more than half like it," he said, quizzically.

"I wasn't thinking of that, although I am not sure that I do like it. I was just thinking how much one could do with two hundred dollars—provided he didn't bet it on a horse-race."

Her own pinched financial condition had fathered the thought. But he did not know that, of course.

XXVI

ON the last day of the fair, Josephine played her part. All that was best of the exhibits—all the bearers of blue ribbons, either animate or inanimate—were marshalled into line and led, driven, dragged, or hauled once around the track. In the judges' stand sat the directors of the fair, and the mayor and other prominent citizens of Tellfair. The grand-stand opposite, with a seating capacity of five thousand, was packed with humanity, for on this day no extra admission to it was charged, and there were many there whose scruples kept them out of it during the races.

The live-stock came first; and as the pace was regulated by stubborn, homesick bulls and apoplectic hogs, the advance was slow. Next came the agricultural machinery, drawn by traction-engines, puffing and sparking, and clanking dismally. Then came the floats. One was a mammoth load of pumpkins, fifteen feet wide and twenty feet high. Of course, it was hollow, or no wheels in the county could have supported it. Another was devoted to grains, another to dairy products, and one to woman's handiwork in textiles.

The last and most magnificent float was entitled "Plenty." Piled to a pyramidal height with the varied products of the farm, and drawn by eight splendid white horses, it groaned along in majestic ponderosity. Around the base, and tucked away in convenient niches all the way up its steep sides, was a number of little girls in flowing hair and spotless white, representing nymphs,

The Pride of Tellfair

fairies, goddesses, or houris, according to the fancy and classical lore of the spectator.

High above these, above the flowing cornucopias and sheafed grain, above all else, sat Ceres. Her arms were bare to the shoulder, after the careless manner of goddesses, and shone dazzling white in the clear sunlight. The heavy band of gold above each elbow was perhaps a new trinket for Ceres, but it had been insisted upon by some of the ladies on the costume committee, and it certainly took nothing from the round, full, strong beauty of the arm. Her jet-black hair was twisted in a Greek knot behind. Her flowing robe fell gracefully away from her open bosom—pleasingly, though certainly not immodestly, as was murmured by a few prudes who had no bosoms of their own.

After the procession, as Josephine emerged from the dressing-room in Art Hall, clad once more in the habiliments of mortality—and feeling more comfortable, for the sun had burned her tender skin—she met old Dr. Burney in his buggy. After complimenting her with the sentimental frankness allowed septuagenarians, he offered her a ride back to town, half a mile away. But as Davenport had brought her out, she declined the old gentleman's courtesy.

"The young goddess spurns the aged Nestor!" he chuckled. "Never mind! Here is another one who will do just as well, though I shall have to take her mamma, too."

It was Bertha and her mother.

"I think she will really be more grateful than I," said Josephine. "She looks so tired."

"I ordered her to stay at home to-day," grumbled the old man.

"How is she, Dr. Burney?"

"It's hard to tell just when a malady of that kind is on the mend," he answered, with owlish wisdom. Then,

The Pride of Tellfair

his vanity overcoming his professional prudence, he added, "You know her trouble, I suppose."

"No."

"The atmosphere in Davenport's office does not agree with her," said he, as complacently as if he had originated the expression.

She at first took him literally, as he had taken Feversham. But she needed no explanation, as he had. His little, knowing blue eyes fairly corkscrewed his meaning into her. The rest of his words were lost upon her. She had a sudden fear of Bertha and her mother. Yet she awaited their approach, and greeted them with outward calm.

She then hurried back into the Art building, fairly panting. She wanted to avoid everybody, but most of all Morris Davenport. She wanted to avoid him for all time to come. She saw a group of young women whom she knew, but she shrank from them. They, too, must know all about this mysterious malady of Bertha's.

She was still standing in indecision when Davenport appeared at the door and peered in. He was looking for her, she knew, and probably supposed that she was still in the dressing-room. She concealed herself behind a group of statuary until he turned away, and then she slipped out by a side door. Once in the friendly seclusion back of the stock-sheds, she fairly ran until she reached a gate which was seldom used. Slipping out, panting, palpitating, and wretched, she found herself in an unfamiliar lane. The way to the village, though, was plain.

She passed a group of children at play. They laughed, and she fancied it was at her. Farther along she met one of her pupils, and the girl seemed to speak coolly. Approaching a more familiar part of the village, she saw an old man sitting under a tree in his yard, reading.

The Pride of Tellfair

She recognized him as the superintendent of the Presbyterian Sunday-school. He must have heard her steps, but he did not look up or speak. She thought he must have seen her coming, and did not want to speak.

She crept into the house like a thief. Victoria had not yet returned, and she went up to her room and lay down softly on the bed. After a while she heard footsteps below, and recognized Victoria's and Elizabeth Catlin's voices. Victoria came to the foot of the stairs and called "Josie!" once or twice. Josephine did not answer, and heard Victoria say, "I guess she hasn't come yet. One would naturally think a horse would make better time than a pedestrian." Then both the girls laughed at the little joke. They thought she was with Davenport, and was dallying on the way. Other people, doubtless, thought so, too, and again her heart swelled. After this the girls' voices died away. How care-free and innocent *they* were! No load of guilt was on *their* hearts.

When Josephine heard Victoria return alone, she stepped to the head of the stairs and called: "I don't feel very well, Victoria. You needn't get any supper for me."

"Were you up-stairs when I called?"

"Yes, but I thought you might bring Elizabeth up, and I didn't feel like talking."

Such a mood was unusual in Josephine, and Victoria looked up the stairs wonderingly.

"The hot sun on your bare head was too much for you, honey!" she exclaimed. "Don't you want a cup of strong tea?"

"You might make me some," answered the other, slowly. "Call me when it is ready, and I'll come down."

Victoria did not call her, though, but brought the tea up, and scanned her sister's face solicitously.

The Pride of Tellfair

"You looked lovely to-day, dear. Everybody said so."

"I didn't feel a bit lovely—it was so hot up there. My arms are all sunburned."

"You poor child, no wonder you feel bad! I'll rub them with cold cream when we go to bed."

Josephine took two or three sips of the hot beverage.

"Did you notice Bertha Congreve to-day?" she asked. "She looks bad."

"I hear she has consumption."

The tea-cup in Josephine's hand suddenly jerked, and a little of the tea spilled.

"That can't be true," she answered, as carelessly as possible. "If people get a little run down there is always some one to start that report. I was talking with Dr. Burney this afternoon about her, and he didn't say anything like that."

"What did he say?"

Josephine's heart sank. She simply could not tell her sister the truth.

"He thought her trouble was more mental or—imaginary."

"Dr. Burney isn't considered a profound medical authority, from what I hear," laughed Victoria.

"What did you hear?"

"Oh, he's always diagnosing wrong," and she mentioned two or three cases the girls had cited to her.

A ray of hope shot into Josephine's inner darkness. Maybe he was wrong this time.

"Every physician makes mistakes, I suppose."

"He makes more than his share." Victoria related how some of the dare-devil young men of the town had hoaxed him once into believing that one of their number had small-pox.

"That was cruel!" said Josephine, but laughed merrily, almost eagerly. "A doctor who could mistake paint

The Pride of Tellfair

spots for pox could make almost any blunder. Who told you Bertha had consumption?"

"Some of the girls."

"They didn't say Dr. Burney said so, did they?"

"I don't know that they did."

"Who did they say had said it?"

"Why, Jo!" laughed Victoria. "This tea is having a decided effect on you. I never knew you to be so gossipy before."

XXVII

“MR. DAVENPORT,” said Josephine, “I have something to tell you, and yet I hardly know how to do it.”

It was the second or third night after the fair, and they were sitting on the side porch, looking through one of the arches of climbing-rose into the old-fashioned garden of peonies, hollyhocks, and bleeding-hearts.

“Fire it point-blank.”

“I am afraid I should wound you.” She smiled a little.

“I’m not thin-skinned.”

“Some things will pierce even a thick skin.”

“Well, try it.”

She sat for a moment picking at her handkerchief.

“Mr. Davenport,” said she, finally, “I don’t think you ought to come here so much.”

He did not answer, and she sat listening to the beating of her heart.

“Why do you say that?” he asked, after what seemed an age.

“I could tell you in a word,” said she, tremulously.

“Very well. Let’s have it in a word, then.”

“You won’t be angry or hurt?” she asked, wavering.

“It doesn’t make any difference what I shall be.”

“I’m afraid you are angry already.”

“No, I am not, though I must confess that I am hurt. But please tell me the worst, and have it over with.”

“I don’t think you ought to come so much because of your relations with Bertha Congreve,” said she.

The Pride of Tellfair

It had come at last. He had been braced for it for many a day, but her words swept him off his feet just the same. He did not speak for some time.

"What has Bertha to do with it, in your opinion?" he asked, at last.

"I think you could answer that question better than I," she said, timidly.

"I said in *your* opinion."

"Well — I know only what I have heard. I don't mean to set myself up as a judge of you, or to insinuate that you are acting towards her in any but the most honorable way."

"Yet you assume that she has a claim upon me."

"No, I do not."

"What have you heard? You say you have heard something."

"Yes, but I wasn't thinking so much of that. I am convinced, from my own observations, that Bertha thinks a great deal of you. I am equally sure that she believes that I have come between you and her, and she hates me for it. I can't bear to have her believe that I have stolen you from her when you and I are only good friends. That is why I think you ought not to come here so much."

"Do you think my coming here less frequently will make me go there more frequently?" he asked, caustically.

"What you do there is none of my business. I simply feel that, under the circumstances, I cannot let you come here so often. It need not end our friendship. I don't want it to—I don't want you to feel that it will. I—I would give half of all I own if I could have avoided telling you this."

Her voice was very tender, but Davenport did not respond with a kindred feeling—yet.

"It will end it, though," said he. "You can't box

The Pride of Tellfair

a friendship up like that and expect it to thrive. How could I or any other self-respecting man come here with a sign like that up—"So far and no farther"?"

"I do not judge you," said she, softly and sweetly.

"I *want* you to judge me. If you find me worthy, I want all the privileges that worth is entitled to. If you find me unworthy, I will stay away altogether."

"I have no evidence to judge you by."

"Would you like some?" he asked, significantly.

She thought a moment.

"I have no right to force you to any disclosures."

"It will not be forcing."

"I have no right even to let you make them," she answered.

"Can you conceive of yourself in a position where you would have a right?" he asked, with a suddenly tight throat.

"I don't believe I understand you," she murmured, but the flutter in her voice belied her words.

"I mean that to give up coming here would cost me a great deal," said he, amazed that his voice should shake so.

"So it would me," she answered, almost inaudibly. "But if it's right!"

"It would mean so much," he continued, huskily, "that I came here to-night with the purpose—"

"Is that Victoria coming?" she asked, nervously.

He paused. It was a false alarm.

"Josephine," he continued, bending nearer, "I came here to-night to ask you to become my wife."

Her hands were folded in her lap, and he covered them both with one of his. For a time she did not move, did not so much as lift her eyes; but he could feel her fingers twitching. Then she gently drew her hands from under his.

"Mr. Davenport, I cannot," said she.

The Pride of Tellfair

He changed his position a little. She thought, perhaps, that he was turning away. At least, she suddenly laid her hand upon his, as if to retain it, and repeated, eagerly, "I cannot, Mr. Davenport, because—because I feel it would be wrong."

"And if it were not wrong?"

"Oh, do not ask me!" she pleaded, and covered her face.

"Why do you think it would be wrong?"

"Because I could not be happy with you under the circumstances. That woman loves you, Morris. How I pity her! If I should marry you, I should carry a guilty conscience day and night. Thoughts of her, suffering from unrequited love, would come between you and me like some horrible phantom, and poison all our joy."

"You still blame me," said he, sadly.

"No, no! Believe me, I do not. You may not be entirely innocent, but I could not believe you guilty of much wrong. I can see just how it happened. I *know* just how it happened."

"Then why do you hold me responsible?"

"I don't hold you responsible, Morris—I don't, I *don't!*" she protested, with all her woman's heart in her voice and eyes, and wringing her hands.

"But you are going to make me suffer for it."

She tightened her fingers around his hand, and looked at him wistfully, with a sad smile upon her lips. It seemed to be sweet to hear him speak of suffering because of her.

"Yes, and I am going to suffer with you," she said, softly.

Davenport's heart suddenly swelled until it filled his throat. He had an insane desire to seize her and press her to his breast, she looked so sweet and white and angelically pure in the soft, summer gloom.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I would sooner suffer with you, Josephine," he said, "than enjoy with another. But can you see where our suffering will help Bertha any?"

"No."

"And it won't do us any good?"

"N-o."

"Then why should we suffer?"

"Because we can't help it," said she, solemnly. "It is not of our choice. We should suffer whether we came together or stayed apart. Can't you understand that?" she asked, with a little motherly air. "Don't think that I am straining at a gnat. I simply don't feel that I could righteously marry you. I don't even feel right to have you here by my side at this minute, talking this way. I feel as though I had taken you from another. Don't get angry! I did it innocently, if I have done it at all; and yet—I had several warnings."

"You mean in what you saw?"

"Yes."

Silence followed. The roses stirred slightly in the breathing of the night.

"Is this thing always to keep us apart?" he asked.

"*Always* is a long time to look ahead."

"But what can remove it?"

"How can I tell you that?" she asked, plaintively.

"But when it is removed we shall know it."

"Has Bertha ever spoken to you about this?"

"Never."

"Has any one else?"

"Yes—but you mustn't ask me who."

"And you still think I must stop coming here?"

"I did not say stop—only that you must not come so often."

"Well, are you still of that opinion?"

She gave a low laugh.

The Pride of Tellfair

'What a man you are! How often have you been coming here, do you think?'

"About three times a week, though it does not seem that often."

"Suppose that you come once a week for a while, though that is too often."

"The weeks will be each a year long," he answered, ruefully.

"Try it and see. And, remember, we are both to forget all that has happened to-night."

He gave her a derisive glance.

"Yes, and also that the sun rose to-day."

XXVIII

“WHAT’S the rift in your and Morris Davenport’s little lute, my lady?” asked Mrs. Bowman, playfully, yet with undeniable curiosity. “Now don’t look innocent. I’m not a man, to be so easily hoodwinked as that. I know there’s something wrong.”

“Then you know more than I do,” declared Josephine, laughing. “I was talking with Morris not fifteen minutes ago, and I am sure we were both perfectly amiable.”

“*Morris*, eh!” repeated Alice. “I noticed you had been calling him that of late. That is what bothers me. How a girl can begin calling a man by his Christian name at the very moment she is giving him a cold shoulder is a decidedly interesting study.”

“I am not giving him a cold shoulder,” protested Josephine.

“You have given him something that disagrees with him. He has been a perfect bear of late.”

“He dropped in to see me last night, and I didn’t notice anything bearish about him.”

“Oh, I know that he calls on you yet,” said Alice, shrewdly. “But you can’t blind me that way. Neither can he. I should like to ask you just one question, if I dared. Will you promise to answer it?”

“I promise nothing.”

“Morris was over to see *me* a night or two ago. We had quite a confidential little chat.”

The Pride of Tellfair

"What did you do with Mr. Bowman?" asked Josephine, waggishly.

"He told me a thing or two."

"Mr. Bowman?"

"No, Morris."

"Well, what was it? I know you are dying to have me ask." But she looked provokingly incurious.

"I sha'n't tell you. Dear, it isn't right for an old married woman like me to be prying into the secrets of you young gazelles. But I know something is wrong between you and Morris, and if one or the other of you doesn't right it soon, I shall take a hand in the game myself."

Josephine had confided her financial troubles to Mrs. Bowman long before, and had discussed them with her many times since. After some further talk about other matters, the elder woman asked Josephine if she were going to be able to make up her interest without trouble. Just now the question grated on Josephine's nerves—not through any fault of Alice's, but because the interest was getting to be a sore subject.

"I think so," she answered. "That is, if our pupils don't desert us in a body. We have lost three this week."

"They are always coming and going, dear. You may get three next week. They left through no fault of yours."

"I don't know," observed Josephine, moodily.

"Yes, you do know," corrected Alice, vigorously. "Bertha stopped only because she was sick. She really should have stopped before."

"I know that," admitted Josephine. "What ails that poor girl, anyhow?"

The question was perfectly sincere, for she was in a fog of doubt yet as to Bertha's real malady. Yet she felt herself blushing. Fortunately, Alice did not see.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I don't know. She has always been delicate. She had a breakdown like this two or three years ago."

The words fell like a benediction on Josephine's ears. If it were an old trouble, *she* certainly could not be responsible.

"Some one told me it was consumption," said she, almost gayly, in her relief.

Alice shook her head scoutingly.

"You can hear anything."

During this conversation, Bowman sat in his study above, tilted back in his swivel-chair, with his long, bony fingers locked together except when he was running them through his straight, black, Indian hair. His eyes were fastened on a little maple just beneath his window. He might have been wrestling with a particularly tough theme, but, as a matter of fact, he was not. He chanced, queerly enough, to be thinking about the very subject under discussion down-stairs.

Mrs. Bowman came up to the study immediately after Josephine's departure, and sank down sidewise on a chair, with her arm over the back. It was a sign that her stay would be brief.

"Arthur, if the Priestley girls shouldn't be able to raise the interest on their mortgage, there wouldn't be the least bit of trouble about it, would there—so long as Morris is handling the matter for them?"

Mr. Bowman did not answer at once, or give sign of having heard. His wife knew him, and waited.

"Can't they raise it?" he asked, finally.

"Josephine says yes, but she is proud, and I can see that she is troubled. They have worked so hard, too," she added, with a little sympathetic tremor in her voice.

"If they can't raise the interest, Morris can add it to the principal."

The Pride of Tellfair

"But then they would have a higher interest to pay next year," said Alice, dubiously.

"Undoubtedly," observed Bowman, coolly. "Do you see any other way out of it? Even Morris Davenport can't make two and two equal five."

"I think it a shame for a man with as much money as Bradley Hayford has to insist on his interest the day it is due from two poor girls who are making their own living."

"He didn't insist on last year's interest the day it was due," said Bowman.

"It wouldn't hurt him to let another year go by."

"No, it wouldn't. But it would hurt the girls. The longer they put off the reckoning, the heavier it will be. Besides, they wouldn't accept a favor of that kind from Hayford. They wouldn't even accept it from Davenport."

Mrs. Bowman said nothing. It was her opinion that there was a great deal of selfishness and injustice in the business world, and it bothered her that her husband should, apparently, so often champion the powerful against the weak. Yet he was always ready to justify his position by arguments which she could not refute. This, too, she thought was a little unkind.

"Wait a moment, Alice," said Bowman, as she rose. She sank back, still in her transient, sidewise position.

"I called at Davenport's office this afternoon, and found that Bertha was at home, sick. I stopped to see her, and found her in a high-strung, nervous condition. She talked very freely to me, and told me, among other things, that she hardly expected to get well. That, of course, was mere morbidness, and I did what I could to dispel it. One confidence led to another, and finally she told me, quite calmly, that her sickness was not of the body; that others than herself were responsible for it, and that some day I should know more about it."

The Pride of Tellfair

Alice listened to the end without the movement of an eyelash, then settled into her chair with an air of permanency.

"What on earth did she mean?"

"Couldn't you guess?" asked Bowman, inscrutably.

Alice hesitated. Her quick mind had instantly leaped to a conclusion, but she was loath to speak it.

"Arthur, you don't mean Morris Davenport?"

"It is quite evident that you do," he answered, with his dark, half-cynical smile

"No, but naturally he came into my mind first in connection with Bertha."

"Very naturally," said he, provokingly. "Also into mine. Have you heard anything?"

"N-o-o. Nothing worth mentioning."

"Suppose you do mention it, anyhow," said he, coolly.

"I don't know whether I ought to or not," said she, doubtfully. "It is only this: Just before the fair, Josephine didn't want to take that Ceres part because she felt she might be coming between Morris and Bertha. I told her it was all nonsense."

"Are you sure it was nonsense?" asked the minister, measuring one long finger against another with great care.

"Arthur Bowman!" exclaimed his wife, indignantly. "You know as well as I do that it was."

"No, Alice, I don't. I might have thought so then, just as you did. But I can't think so now."

"You don't believe that Morris would be guilty of anything dishonorable—that he would trifle with Bertha's affections?" she asked, still flushed.

"Certainly I don't. But he might have found that he had made a mistake." He paused at the fire in his wife's blue eyes. "Or he might have been merely thoughtless. Morris is not a man of exceptionally fine sensibilities, to tell the truth. Just wait—I am not

The Pride of Tellfair

maligning him. Nor is he a man of keen perceptions, outside of business matters. He is a good deal quicker to strike than he is to see, and that accounts for his success. In other words, he is just the man to wreck a woman's happiness through sheer blundering."

"I don't believe it," said Alice, flatly. "Morris can be as tender as any man I know. And as for thoughtfulness, Arthur," she added, with wifely candor, "I think you could go to school to him."

"He would see a handkerchief on the floor twice as quickly as I, and restore it to a lady while I was debating the best manner in which to do it—if that is what you mean by thoughtfulness. I was speaking of something deeper. But, without going further into his shortcomings or otherwise, there is certainly something wrong. And I don't see where I can make a move to mend it."

"Keep out of it, Arthur," said Alice, with the instinctive wisdom of her sex. "Nine times out of ten interference in a matter of this kind does more harm than good."

He did not answer, but that was his way. Mrs. Bowman, after some further remarks, left the study. But her step was not as springy as when she had entered.

XXIX

D AVENPORT, true to his promise, allowed a full week to elapse between visits to Josephine. The fourth visit, however, was one day short of a week from the third, owing to Davenport's leaving for the city the next morning. The fifth visit was two days short of a week from this, and the interval between was broken by a buggy-ride. After this the week limit was disregarded entirely, and his calls became as frequent as before.

Josephine made no demur, and Davenport himself was hardly conscious of breaking an agreement. It seemed to have broken itself. One subject, however, was barred from their talk. This was their love. But one evening Davenport suddenly bent over Josephine in his old, familiar manner and said, softly, "Don't you see, Josephine, how necessary we are to each other's happiness?"

"You promised not to speak of that again," said she.

"So I did. I will keep my promise, too."

Perhaps he intended to; perhaps he did not, thinking that her woman's No meant Yes. Anyhow, with male daring, he soon ventured on the forbidden ground again. Again she warned him off; again he retired. Thus they drifted, he trespassing further each time before her warning sounded, and leaving more slowly after it sounded. The eye of prescience was not required to foresee the time when her warnings would cease altogether, or at least when he would cease to heed them.

Yet neither was consciously playing with his or her word, or consciously proving false to self. The weeks

The Pride of Tellfair

since Davenport's proposal had wrought a great change in their relations, so it seemed to them. The chasm between them, once yawning impassable, had apparently closed, as if by magic. Bertha was much better. No more disquieting gossip reached Josephine's ears; and though she had not withdrawn her mandate against Davenport's mentioning his love, yet she could conscientiously let her heart leap in secret when he did rebelliously mention it.

Yet in this very dawn of hope, a raven—dark, ill-omened bird of prophecy—was stretching its neck for a dismal, warning croak. The Reverend Arthur Bowman was by nature and training a cautious man. He thought not only twice, but thrice, before he spoke. For six years he had trod the difficult path of ministerial life in Tellfair with scarcely a slip. He had manoeuvred on the exposed neutral ground between the old, conservative element in his church and the young, radical element, and had scarcely been touched by a shot from either side.

At the same time, Arthur Bowman was no mere trimmer. He was a brave, conscientious man, in spite of some people who sneered at his tact and called it by another name. Therefore, when he finally reached the conclusion that Josephine Priestley was unwittingly doing harm by receiving Morris Davenport's attentions, he resolved to tell her so.

It would be difficult, as well as superfluous, to trace his path to this resolution. Even to intimate that he and Davenport were of opposite and warring temperaments perhaps does the minister an injustice. Yet it is doubtless true that Davenport's full-blooded, vigorous constitution, his unbroken success, and his tireless pursuit of any object of desire sharpened the cold-blooded, easy-going scholar's eye as to his duty in this particular instance. He did not tell his wife, however, of his in-

The Pride of Tellfair

tentions. He did not believe her capable of laying aside her friendship for Josephine and Davenport, and sitting in unbiased judgment.

He communicated his warning to Josephine one Sunday morning after church, in a little room to which he had led her aside. No one could have clothed his meaning in more delicate or cautious language. At the same time, no one could have made it plainer. His words struck Josephine with the unexpectedness of a blow from a friendly hand. So stunned was she, in fact, that Bowman took her silence for assent, and turned away to answer some call.

She knew that she had unwittingly deceived him. She knew that he bore away the impression that there was nothing between her and Davenport, and that she would at once put his good advice into effect. But nothing was further from her mind at the moment than this. Smarting under the injustice she had done Davenport by not speaking out, her love suddenly leaped to arms, and she hurried out into the vestibule to tell Bowman that he was all wrong; that Davenport was in no way bound to Bertha Congreve; that she had his own word for it, and that she— She would do what?—she who herself had bound Davenport not to mention his love again?

She halted to collect her thoughts. The precious seconds thus lost were enough to allow Bowman to rejoin his wife and pass out of the door. The golden opportunity was gone.

If Davenport had called on Josephine that afternoon or evening, the course of subsequent events would have been altered, for she was in a tender mood, and eager to resent in the most emphatic and irrevocable manner the unjust insinuations of her pastor. But Davenport, having seen her on Saturday evening, had gone out to his parents' to spend Sunday. By Monday morning all

The Pride of Tellfair

the old torturous doubts had returned to Josephine, and she recalled her and Davenport's intimacy of the past few weeks with shame. Ah, those broken vows! What must he, in his heart, think of her weakness? Tears of remorse filled her eyes, and she bitterly resolved that, cost what it might, she would, from that hour, walk a path which none could call devious. It would all have to be gone over again with Davenport, for he had slipped entirely out of the niche she had placed him in for safety; and she virtuously ached for the moment to come when she could show him that she was not weak. Ached, yet sorrowed.

She thought he might come that night. She hoped he would. But when he suddenly drove up in the afternoon her heart leaped. She was not yet braced for the ordeal. He tied his colt in a hurry—he seemed always in a hurry, and somehow she loved him for it—walked briskly in, sprang lightly up the steps, and gave the bell a vigorous ring.

"I can't stop, not even for half a minute," said he, breezily. "I have a telegram calling me to Chicago, and my train leaves in just eleven minutes. I shall probably be gone two or three days, and I—what do you suppose I came for? I came to say good-bye!" He smiled, but there was a look in his eye that made her heart quicken. "I couldn't go without saying good-bye—*now*." He held out his hand. "Good-bye. Be good. I shall see you either Wednesday or Thursday night."

He took her hand, pressed it for an instant, and then was gone. She leaned weakly against the jamb until his glittering wheels had vanished down the street. One more link forged in the chain she had to break!

Victoria, returning from the afternoon mail, brought the news that Bertha, by the doctor's orders, was to take a week's vacation, to be spent at home in rest.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I thought she was so much better," said Josephine, with a pang.

"I guess everybody thought so," answered Victoria, and went through to the kitchen.

A call on a prospective pupil that afternoon took Josephine past the Congreve home, and, acting upon an impulse, she suddenly turned in and rang the bell. Bertha had spent a bad night, Mrs. Congreve said, in answer to an inquiry, and was asleep just then. It was not to be expected that a sick person should be awakened for a caller, yet there was something vaguely hostile in Volley's tone and manner. It not only hurt Josephine, but irritated her as well, for she felt that the suffering in this unfortunate affair was not all on one side.

"The rest will undoubtedly do her a great deal of good," said she, as graciously as she could.

"We hope so," answered Volley, calmly.

"I understand that she had a breakdown similar to this two or three years ago."

Volley lifted her head instantly.

"Who told you that?" she asked, bluntly.

"Mrs. Bowman, I think."

"It was nothing like this. She was threatened with typhoid fever then. I don't know what is the matter with her now. I think perhaps she has worried over her work. Her trouble seems to be more mental than physical. We have wanted to take her out of the office for some time, but she is ambitious. I don't think Mr. Davenport quite realizes the difference between him and a frail girl. He is made of iron himself, and he sets a pace in the office-work which few men could follow, much less a woman. I have often told him that, if he had a wife, he would know more about the physical limitations of a woman."

"Still, he is very good about letting her off," ob-

The Pride of Tellfair

served Josephine, mildly. "I know he is with her lessons."

"Oh, there is nothing *small* about him," answered Volley, as if determined that no one should twist her words out of shape. "He is simply thoughtless. One afternoon, for instance, he came down here when Bert hadn't gone back after dinner, to ask her to finish writing some important letters he had dictated. The poor child could hardly hold her head up, but she went back."

Josephine was silent. She simply did not believe the last, perhaps not the first, and after a little further talk she left.

XXX

ON Wednesday evening the band gave its weekly concert in Court-house Square, the last one of the season. The Tellfair City Brass Band was generally believed by citizens of Tellfair to be the best musical organization of its size and kind in northern Illinois. It was in the habit of bringing home prizes from county fairs, farmers' institutes, firemen's tournaments, and woodsmen's picnics—prizes were lavishly awarded at these gatherings, to insure attendance the next year—and its hall over Gilroy's Opera-house was liberally hung with these trophies.

Both the *Visitor* and the *Citizen* always referred to Charlie McDonald as "our talented leader"—it was superfluous to say of what—and strove to outdo each other in laudatory comments on the band's excellence. As few of their readers had ever sat in the editorial chair, or suspected how much of an editor's time on a country paper is spent in scheming for advertising, subscriptions, and job work, these complimentary remarks were generally swallowed without salt. On band-concert nights, it is safe to say that two-thirds of Tellfair's population could be found in Court-house Square. The people did not, it is true, turn out so numerously to the winter concerts in the opera-house—admission, twenty-five cents—but one can't go to everything.

On this particular evening the ladies of the Presbyterian Church were serving ice-cream and cake—the churches served turn about—and Josephine had charge

The Pride of Tellfair

of one of the tables. A few Japanese lanterns were strung up for ornament, but light was furnished by a number of flaring gasoline torches nailed to trees. The band-stand itself, however, was lighted by incandescents from the new electric plant; and though they had a habit of going out most inopportunately, owing to defective wiring among the trees of the square, no one would have willingly gone back to the old kerosene-lamps and tin sconces.

It was a mixed company which sat at Josephine's table, about half-past nine. There were Lucius Shaw, president of the First National Bank, and his wife; the Reverend Bowman—without his wife, who was busy elsewhere; Lowdermilk Tidd and his wife, though the frail little woman was scarcely visible in the shadow of his huge bulk; old Barry Morse, the village skinflint, wifeless and childless and wellnigh friendless; Marmaduke Blaine, proprietor of the Basley House, and "distantly related to James G.," as he would have informed you himself; and Schuyler Harrison, Register of Deeds, with his wife.

The fair waitresses wore an innovation that evening in the way of aprons—a dainty little affair scarcely larger than a man's handkerchief, which Mrs. Bowman had first seen in a woman's restaurant in Chicago. Lowdermilk Tidd remarked to old Barry, loud enough for the ladies to overhear, that he fancied those aprons were about the size and pattern worn by Mother Eve. Old Barry snickered—Tidd was a man of prominence—and some of the ladies smiled, although they also blushed. Lowdermilk's face grew redder than ever as he silently shook over his joke, his thick neck swelled, and his cheeks bulged like toy balloons. Little Mrs. Tidd, however, looked pained, and glanced solicitously at Josephine, the only unmarried woman at the table. Josephine, though, seemed not to have heard, for she was

The Pride of Tellfair

calmly passing the cake to Mr. Blaine for the third time.

Lucius Shaw did not like Lowdermilk Tidd, so he did not laugh either. Instead, he drew a cigar from his pocket, without offering one to the other gentlemen or apologizing to the ladies, lighted it, and drew a complacent puff or two. He had a habit, when about to deliver himself of something weighty, of thoughtfully closing his eyes, or nearly so. It was an impressive attitude, too, with most people. This he now struck.

"Gentlemen, this is a great country," he began, in a tone of lofty philosophy. "I have been sitting here, taking in the scene before me. There is a sight not to be seen in any other country on God's footstool. Here we are, a little community of two thousand souls, set down on the prairie here like a raisin on a plum-pudding. In any other age or any other country, we would be steeped in provincialism, and the happenings of the great outside world would be merely belated echoes in our ears. Yet here we sit listening to a first-class band discoursing first-class music—not classical, perhaps"—the overture to "William Tell" had just closed—"but good, respectable music. Instead of candles or kerosene-lamps, the stand is lit with electric lights. If they should go out, you could step into the court-house, where you would find a telephone, another great invention, and in less than a minute Horace Mann would be on the way to repair them."

"Not unless he wanted to stop on his way up for a drink," growled Marmaduke Blaine. "It took me an hour and a half to get him the other night—by telephone, too."

"If that stand should catch fire," continued Mr. Shaw, ignoring the interruption, "you could turn on a stream from that hydrant. A few years ago we would have had to carry the water in buckets. Everybody is

The Pride of Tellfair

dressed well, and everybody has money to spend, and is having a good time. Yet we are as orderly as a Sunday-school, and there isn't an officer of the law in sight—no uniformed minions or disguised spies of the State. We are a self-governed, self-supporting community, as independent socially, politically, religiously—and industrially, you might almost say—as if we lived on an island of the sea. Yet if we should have trouble here—say a riot which we couldn't quell—the governor of this State would have troops on the way here within an hour. If these should prove inadequate, the President of the United States could and would have a regiment or a brigade flying hither at the rate of a mile a minute, within another hour. If we should be wiped out by fire to-night, every city, town, and village from Maine to California would know it by to-morrow's breakfast, and before noon they would have provided us with dinner. This is a great country."

He tilted his silk hat back, and balanced his smoking cigar between white fingers set with a diamond, as if complacently conscious that he himself was no unimportant member of this model, prosperous, and unequalled country.

"Ask him where this brick ice-cream came from, if he thinks we are independent," said Bowman, in an undertone to Josephine, with his dark, sarcastic smile.

"Not for a share of his bank stock," answered Josephine. "He is composing a poem, in his own way, and I am not sure that it is a bad way. He loves this town, and that is what he is trying to say."

"He ought to love it. He has made a fortune out of it," retorted the minister, feeling her pin-prick of rebuke.

His words, in turn, nettled Josephine. In the first place, she did not like his speaking to her in an undertone; he had done that more than once of late. In the

The Pride of Tellfair

second place, she did not like the spirit of his remarks, or think them becoming to his office. She therefore found it convenient to move to another part of the table.

"We'd be better off if we had more officers of the law," said old Barry Morse, in a high, querulous key. "Pete Blanchard makes about as good a constable as a hitchin'-post would. Some boys stoned my chickens yesterday and broke a pullet's leg."

Marmaduke Blaine swallowed the last of his cake, and looked up with interest.

"Barry," said he, in his stentorian voice, "if you've got any pullets of a fryin' size, bring 'em down to the hotel, broken legs and all, and I'll give you twenty-five cents apiece for them straight through, big and little. Hear?"

The old miser scanned the company one by one, with a pained, drawn expression on his face.

"There might be some," he admitted, cautiously. "They're mighty skeerce now, though."

"You look through your coops again," returned Marmaduke, placidly. "Maybe you won't find them so scarce. Farmers don't report 'em scarce. But I like town-raised chickens best when I can get them," with a wink at Tidd. "So you bring some down to-morrow. Hear? But be sure they're fryin' size," he added, warningly. "Don't bring any canary-birds down, like that neighbor of yours did."

"I'm a neighbor of his, Duke," said Schuyler Harrison, with the bland smile of a man who has fed long at the public crib and has no present intentions of changing his diet. "I wish you would discriminate."

"I mean that lame boy on Barry's west—that Bill Wicherell. Blamed if he didn't bring me some chickens the other day that a travelling man from the East took for rice-birds."

The Pride of Tellfair

Old Barry had listened closely since mention of Billy Wicherell, and he now suddenly bent forward.

"Was one of them chickens that Billy brought you a barred Plymouth Rock, Mr. Blaine?"

The landlord's face, glistening with fatness, grew preternaturally grave.

"Now that you mention it, blamed if I don't believe it was, Barry—kind of a darkish-lightish Plymouth Rock?"

"Yes, yes," assented the old man, eagerly. "With the third toe on the left foot gone."

"Hanged if my cook didn't mention that very toe. Said she didn't know whether it would affect the meat or not. But how comes it you know so much about Billy Wicherell's chickens, Barry?"

"Billy Wicherell's!" exclaimed the old man, shrilly, leaping to his feet. "That was *my* chicken. I raised it myself, and it lost that toe in a steel trap. I'd swear to it in any court of law in the land, and I've missed it for a week. That imp stole that chicken, and I'll have the law on him before he sleeps."

He rushed off for the constable, leaving Lowdermilk Tidd and Blaine quaking like bogs. The ladies, though, thought it a shame; and Bowman, secretly indignant at the callous joke, quietly left to overtake the old man and set him right.

"That *sample* of cream was all right, Miss Josephine," said Mr. Tidd, facetiously, "and if you are now ready I will give you my order for a *plate* of it."

The second plate, containing a double portion, was served him, and rapidly disappeared before his voracious onslaught. When it was gone and the plate scraped, he gently laid his great arms on the table, crossed his pudgy fingers, breathed audibly, and looked as contented and stupid as a stalled ox. A moment later, though, he jammed his fat hand into an upper

The Pride of Tellfair

vest-pocket, and after a struggle drew out a cigar. A second struggle brought out one for Mr. Harrison, and a third one for the landlord. Then he turned in his chair as cautiously as an elephant crosses an untried bridge, until he was braced on one side by the chair-back and on the other by the table, thus totally eclipsing his wife with his broad back.

"Speaking of improvements, Shaw," said he, between his labored breaths, "it's an impressive fact to me that if a crowned head of Europe should die to-night, we people right here in Tellfair would know it before it happened."

"We'd know it *six hours* before, paw!" eagerly spoke up a boy of ten or twelve, standing near with a plate of cream in his hand.

Tidd gave him a glance which expressed proprietorship and slight disapprobation of his forwardness, but said nothing. Harrison asked, however, "How is that, Wilbur?"

"Because the electricity travels faster than the sun," answered the boy, quickly.

"Then we shouldn't hear of the death before it actually happened, should we?"

"No, sir. Just apparently."

The eyes of the little mother, who doubtless did not understand the puzzling thing herself, beamed with a humble, repressed pride which for some reason made Josephine's heart ache. She had once thought Lowdermilk Tidd jolly and funny, but she turned away now from his triple chin and bull neck with something like disgust.

XXXI

“**H**ERE comes a little girl who has been sick,” observed Mr. Shaw.

Three persons approached — Bertha Congreve, Miss Gwendolen Harvey, one of Tellfair’s heavy beauties, and, between them, a young man who was creating considerable talk in Tellfair at that moment. He was from Rockford, and had advanced commercial ideas. His new “department-store,” as he called it in the loose language of conversation, was not in operation yet; but flaming posters on every bill-board and every country road for miles around announced that the grand, formal opening would take place in two weeks. They further stated that it would be Mr. Collie’s endeavor to run a wide-awake, fair and square, up-to-date dry-goods emporium, equal to anything in northern Illinois outside of Chicago. A large corps of trained clerks and a cash-railway system would give his patrons the quickest and most efficient service. “Large sales and small profits is my motto.” To all of which, and much more, he subscribed himself, “Yours for business.”

Mr. Collie was about thirty, spare and undersized. He wore a yellow plush vest which would have attracted many an admiring glance at a prize-fight. Neither his teeth nor his linen was of the whitest, and he was slightly ill at ease in the society of ladies. Yet there was something about him which gave his printed rhetoric an ominous ring in the ears of his prospective competitors. His little face was weak, but on his proper field—the

The Pride of Tellfair

floor of his store—he had the eye and mien of a general. His insignificant little body suddenly acquired grace and power, and no one could watch him long, as he superintended the arrangement of the stock, without reaching the conclusion that James Collie was a born merchant. And a born anything, whether statesman or jockey, is an object to which the world promptly makes its obeisance.

The trio paused a few feet away. After a murmured consultation, Mr. Collie and Miss Harvey went off by themselves. Bertha, who had apparently promised to wait for them, sat down next to Mr. Shaw.

"Miss Priestley, bring this little lady a plate of cream, please," said Shaw, gallantly.

"No, thank you, Mr. Shaw. Dr. Burney let me come out to-night on condition that I eat absolutely nothing, and you mustn't tempt me."

"If you was my girl, you'd eat all you pleased," snorted Tidd. "You'd get well, too, a heap quicker than you are now. Burney belongs to the starvation school."

"It is a school with a good many graduates," observed Lucius, coolly.

"A glance at our fat cemeteries would convince any one of that fact," retorted Lowdermilk, scathingly.

"It is stuffing that usually makes fat things, not starving," answered the banker, "and I think the truth holds good of the cemeteries you refer to." He glanced at Schuyler Harrison for approval of this neat shaft. Mr. Harrison, who had an overdue note at the bank, winked approvingly—when Tidd wasn't looking.

"How about bank accounts?" asked Tidd, purple around the eyes.

Shaw's parsimony was a matter of public knowledge, and Tidd felt that there was material for a heavy shot in this last remark; but somehow it failed to make a hit, and no one laughed.

The Pride of Tellfair

Cheerful conversation, gentlemen, I vum, before one of Burney's own patients," declared Marmaduke Blaine. "How you feeling, Berthy?"

"A little better, thank you."

"I seen your mother buying some malt extract in Grant's the other day. She feeding you on that now?"

"Yes, but I don't like it. It is so bitter."

Her angelic mood was on her strong to-night, and she answered these inquiries in a plaintive, patient little invalid's voice that was decidedly effective. She watched the scene around her with far-away, dreamy eyes, as if she were no part of it. When the band played a tender minor thing, which most of the listeners probably thought entirely unworthy that thunderous aggregation of brass, the tears trembled on Bertha's lashes.

Josephine saw them, and it gave her a tightness across the chest. Stooping over, she asked Bertha to walk home with her, in case her friends did not come back, and she and Victoria would go the rest of the way with her. The friends did not come back—as any one knowing Gwendolen Harvey's partiality for having a young man all to herself might have predicted—and the two girls set out together after the last number.

There was a chill in the night air, a foreboding of winter, bringing to the mind pleasing pictures of a crackling fire, closed shutters, lamp, and book. A few crickets and katydids, their strength almost gone, feebly fiddled the last measures of the great symphony of summer. The frogs in Merriwether's Pond, a quarter of a mile away, trilled faintly through floating wreaths of mist. The night breeze sadly kissed the hectic cheeks of the dying leaves on maple and elm, and rustled mournfully among the dead hollyhocks in the garden. The moon, no longer decked in the festal yellow of harvest, but wrapped in cold, silver gray, climbed the eastern

The Pride of Tellfair

sky behind bars of ragged cloud and cast a mystic spell around the neighboring chimney-tops.

In this ethereal light, which flooded the front steps, Bertha looked more like a spirit than a denizen of earth. Her light hair floated around her face in a gossamer cloud, and her hands were small and white beyond belief—little waxen playthings. Josephine wanted to clasp the frail form to her strong breast and breathe into it health and strength, and kiss her pretty, weak mouth, and tell her that she had forever renounced Morris Davenport. Yet she really had no idea of doing any such extravagant thing, and their talk was of a studiously impersonal nature as they waited for Victoria.

In the midst of a silence between them a glowing cigar suddenly appeared in the darkness down by the gate, followed by a snuffling and snorting like that of an asthmatic pug-dog. Nearly anybody in Tellfair would at once have recognized these sounds as emanating from Reverdy Wheatlocks, who suffered from hay-fever every fall. After these preliminaries, a voice came up the walk which could have been heard a block away.

"Say, is that you, Miss Priestley?"

"Yes," said Josephine. Her voice sounded strangely low and subdued in comparison with the other's stentorian bellowing.

"Morris Davenport ain't there, is he?"

"No."

Silence followed. The cigar brightened and dulled, brightened and dulled. Reverdy was evidently sucking counsel.

"Well, say, Miss Priestley," he went on, in a louder voice, if that were possible, "there's goin' to be a hoss-sale over in the town of Troy to-morrow mawnin' at eight o'clock, sharp, and I've an idea there will be some hosses there that Morris might want to git his hands on. I'm goin' over myself, and I'd kind of like to have him

The Pride of Tellfair

along. Ezry Slaymaker wanted me to keep my eye open for a span of drivers for him, and I thought I might strike something over there in Troy. Morris would know better than me what Slaymaker would want, I expect. He didn't say nothin' to you about goin' over to the sale, did he?"

"No. And I'm sure I don't know where you could find him." She didn't know whether Davenport had returned from Chicago or not, though she supposed he had not. She said nothing about his trip, however, knowing that Reverdy would learn all about it at the hotel. Perhaps Bertha's presence restrained her. As a matter of fact, Josephine did not want either Bertha or Wheatlocks to know just how familiar she was with Davenport's comings and goings.

"Well, I guess I'll be movin'," observed Reverdy. "The boys down-town kind of thought he might be here. He ain't likely to show up later, I suppose. It's 'most ten now. I guess I'll go down to the Basley House and lay for him, though I'd kind of like to git to bed. We'll have to make an early start. Well, good-night. *Lovely evenin'.*"

He puffed off like a superannuated Mississippi side-wheeler. But twenty feet farther on he made another landing.

"If he should happen to show up, Miss Priestley, I wish you'd just tell him about that sale. You might say that I'll be at the hotel at half-past six o'clock to-morrow mawnin'. The sale is at Horner's — Cal Horner's. Morris knows the place. First farm south of Newt Bentley's. What's that?"

Josephine had not spoken, but she now said, "There is no possibility of his being here to-night, Mr. Wheatlocks."

"No'm, I suppose not. He's a terrible night-owl, though. I've known him to sit in his office and write till two o'clock in the mawnin'. Well, good-night."

The Pride of Tellfair

Again he got laboriously under way, but at the very last section of iron fencing his head-light again swung into view and stopped.

"I don't suppose he'd take anything," he called, in a voice that must have vibrated every tympanum in the neighborhood, "but you might say that if I find anything that Slaymaker wants, I'll give him a ten-spot and welcome; yessum. It 'll be wuth that to me."

He disappeared in the shadow of the trees. Josephine thought she heard him stop once more in front of Channing's, two doors beyond. But, if so, the distance was too great even for a man accustomed to carrying on a confidential chat across a ten-acre field, and no further instructions rent the night air. What she did hear was an impish, suppressed laugh from Catlin's front porch, where Elizabeth and her sweetheart were presumably tarrying, and of course had heard all. Vexed as Josephine was at Wheatlocks, she could scarcely restrain a smile herself. Not so with Bertha, however. Her face, so white in the moonlight, grew red at the laughter next door.

"I guess he'll go without Morris," she said, in a slightly tremulous voice.

"Why?" asked Josephine.

"Because he's in the city."

Josephine regarded her companion thoughtfully for a moment.

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Wheatlocks so?" she asked, curiously.

"Because I didn't want him to know that I was here."

"Why, pray?" asked Josephine, bridling.

"Because I was ashamed," answered Bertha, abruptly. Then, to Josephine's amazement, she hid her face in a handkerchief and began to cry—softly, noiselessly, pitifully.

"Why should you be ashamed, Bertha?" asked Jose-

The Pride of Tellfair

phine, gently, but with an accusing answer proceeding from her own heart.

Bertha shook her head and would not answer the question. But a moment later she wailed under her breath, "Oh, I am so unhappy—so unhappy! I wish I were dead!"

Josephine could only look. A great guilt tied her tongue. But with what eloquent eyes she looked—great, lustrous, melting orbs! Suddenly she slipped the bond from her tongue. Leaning forward, with every muscle tense, she laid her hand upon Bertha's shoulder.

"Bertha," said she, in a voice thrilling with emotion, "I want you to tell me, woman to woman, if I have contributed to your unhappiness."

Bertha made no answer, and after a moment Josephine added, quietly, "I see you think I have."

"Yes, but I don't blame you," came from behind the handkerchief.

"Don't say that. You can't help blaming me. Perhaps I ought to be blamed. I know I am not entirely innocent. Yet I may not be as guilty as you think; and I want to tell you that under the circumstances Mr. Davenport and I can never be more than friends. He understands that as well as I do."

She paused, wondering if she had lied; wondering if she were not doing wrong, even if she had not lied thus to raise hopes which in the end must be dashed again. Bertha did not answer, but she was listening; her sobs were restrained, and her whole attitude said, "Go on."

But Josephine could not go on. She already saw before her Davenport's frowning, dissenting face. Bertha finally lowered her handkerchief, and sat in a reverie for some time, her little, baby mouth still occasionally stiffening and quivering at some painful thought.

"It doesn't make any difference to me now," said she. "He will never care for me any more."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Whatever comes, Bertha," said Josephine, after a moment, "you must not give yourself over to grief. That is mere weakness. You must try to be cheerful. You must not think yourself the only girl who has ever suffered thus. That gives you an exaggerated notion of your trouble, and only makes it worse. I know that you suffer, and must suffer, but brooding over it will only make you suffer more."

"It is easy enough to say that," answered Bertha, with a flash of resentment.

"Yes, and hard to do. But that is no reason why I should not say it and you do it."

Silence followed. The moon had slipped behind the peak of a maple, throwing the girls in shadow. A dog barked mournfully in the distance; the clock on the Presbyterian church struck the half-hour. Bertha shivered and drew her light jacket closer.

"I ought to be going," said she. "Papa will be worried."

"I can't imagine what keeps Victoria," said Josephine. "If Jean is still up, we won't wait any longer for her."

Jean was up, as he always was until both his fair charges were safely housed. He did not walk with the young women, but a little behind them. On the way back, though, Josephine slipped her hand through his arm, and the bent old man seemed to straighten under her touch and step off more briskly. As they entered the gate again, she saw Victoria waiting on the steps, wondering where they could all be, and a little afraid to go into the great, dark house alone.

Josephine had made up her mind, although her heart sank at the prospect. All intercourse between her and Davenport must now absolutely cease.

XXXII

DAVENPORT returned from Chicago at half-past six on Thursday. As he emerged from the dining-room of the Basley House, after a late supper, he lit a cigar, and for a moment leaned against the counter. There was frost in the air outside—the weather had suddenly changed—and the hotel office showed its first signs of the social activity and good cheer which prevailed there during the long autumn and winter evenings.

A wood fire crackled and snapped in the grate. Landlord Blaine was haggling and blustering with a belated, half-tipsy farmer over some Thanksgiving turkeys. Henry Drake, in his army blue, stood in front of the grate, solemnly drunk. Next to the plate-glass front sat Isaac Buggs and old man Button, playing checkers, as silent as Indians except when the latter fiercely swore over some unlucky move. In a corner three men were listlessly playing "cut-throat" euchre, pending the arrival of a fourth to make up a good game. Lucius Shaw, whose family was out of town, as it often was, sat behind a Chicago afternoon paper, fragrant blue clouds floating up from his Havana.

Not far from him sat a man whom Davenport was surprised to see there. It was old Campeau. He sat uneasily in his chair, with an alien air. His pinched, withered face was sterner than usual, and it was clear that he was not to be classed among the Basley House loafers.

"Old boy wants to see you, Morris," said Marmaduke,

The Pride of Tellfair

in a tone that the "old boy" must certainly have overheard.

At Davenport's approach, Campeau instantly arose and removed his hat. It was an act of courtesy seldom seen in Tellfair between men, and elicited a democratic sniff of amusement and contempt from one of the eu-chre players.

"Mr. Davenport, could I have a word with you in private?" asked the old man, in his low, polite voice. When Davenport had led him aside a little, Campeau continued: "I trust you will pardon me, sir, but I want to speak to you about the mortgage. I come here without Miss Josephine's knowledge, and I fear she would be very angry if she knew it. But I don't see, sir, how she is going to pay the interest."

He paused, with sadness and appeal in his eyes. Davenport, who was then only waiting for eight o'clock to go and see Josephine, felt a quickening for the first time towards the faithful old servitor. After all, Campeau was one of the family.

"Don't worry about that, Campeau," said he, cordially. "I'll take care of all that. No harm shall come to her."

"She is very proud, sir," ventured Campeau.

"I know that. It shall all be in a business way. I shall simply draw a new mortgage for enough to cover the old mortgage and all unpaid interest, and destroy the old one."

"But will that not be only postponing the day of reckoning? Next year's interest will be heavier than ever."

"Very little. Figure it out for yourself. The two years' interest amounts to two hundred and forty dollars. Five per cent. of that is only twelve dollars. They are paying six per cent. now, but I can place the new mortgage at five. Therefore, as a matter of fact,

The Pride of Tellfair

the interest next year will be only one hundred and twelve dollars, whereas this year and last it was one hundred and twenty."

"That is true, sir. But when they come to paying off the principal—they hope to do that some day, you know, sir." He paused, staggered by the thought of his two tender mistresses paying off, by their own hands, an indebtedness of over two thousand dollars.

"That is a long way ahead, Campeau," said Davenport, kindly. "A man of your wisdom ought hardly to let himself worry over that yet." He wanted to add, in explanation of his own hopefulness, that he expected to pay that principal himself some day, as Josephine's husband.

The old man, however, was not satisfied, and evidently had something on his mind. A moment later it came out.

"The young ladies have a very dear friend in the South, Mr. Davenport—a gentleman by the name of Zénobe Chouinard. He stood by them through all their misfortunes, so far as they would let him. He knows their financial condition in a way, though he can hardly suspect just how bad things are with them—how frugally they live, or how little they have spent for clothes since they came here." He paused and drew a letter from his pocket. "I have here, sir, a letter from him asking as to their ability to meet the interest on this mortgage. In case they can't pay it, he offers to advance it, provided it can be arranged."

"Why did he write to you instead of Miss Josephine?" asked Davenport.

"It's a delicate matter," answered the old man, slowly.

"Do you think she would accept aid from him?"

"I don't know. I fear not," said Campeau, gloomily.

"That is why I came to you."

The Pride of Tellfair

Davenport suspected that the old man, who was not as clear-headed as he once was, wanted him to give Josephine a secret credit on the mortgage, the money to come from Chouinard. Of course, this was not to be thought of, and it was not likely that Chouinard himself would be a party to such a plan.

"I can't do anything, Campeau. It is not necessary that we should. I have no idea that Miss Josephine would accept money from this man. But if she would, and matters ever come to a crisis, the thing for you to do would be to write Chouinard to communicate directly with her."

He was about to add that he himself would see that matters did not come to a crisis, when the red-headed boy who took care of Mrs. Shipman's horse noisily opened the door and bawled in, "Mrs. Shipman wants to see you out in her kerridge, Morris."

With a parting word to Campeau, who was still in doubt, Davenport stepped outside. It was a quarter-past seven, and he had forty-five minutes to spare before going up to Josephine's. Mrs. Shipman and her daughter, Mrs. Hope, were in the carriage.

"Get in with Patrick, Morris, please, and ride up to the house," said the old lady, recognizing Davenport's step. "I have something to tell you. I was down this afternoon to see you, but Bertha said you were in the city. Do you go to the city to work or play, Morris? It seems to me that you are gone about half the time."

"To work, always," he answered, climbing in on the front seat.

He saw Mrs. Shipman often, but it had been months since he had sat in her old-fashioned, high-ceiled parlor, with its ponderous horse-hair furniture, grim family portraits, and tall mantel-piece. As he awaited the return of the old lady, who had slipped away mysteriously for something she had to show him, his mind ran back to the

The Pride of Tellfair

barefooted days of his childhood. Mrs. Shipman then used to bring him into this room, as a treat, and, sitting down to the old rosewood piano, play some strange, slow music, the like of which he never heard elsewhere.

He used to sit down, with the end of his backbone hooked over the edge of the great, slippery chair, and his toes dug into the carpet to keep from sliding off, while he nervously revolved his tattered straw hat in his hands. But he would much rather have stood. Moreover, the parlor was really no treat for him; there was a chill in its air on the hottest days, and he never could breathe just right in the perfumed atmosphere. Also, when he lifted his dilated eyes to the family portraits, he was always awed by the great change which had taken place in the human race in the last hundred years, for these people on the walls reminded him of no men or women he had ever seen. The women had such long necks and sloping shoulders, and the men such slanting foreheads and peaked noses.

When Mrs. Shipman returned, she carefully closed both doors, gliding from one to the other without the least hesitation. Then, approaching a chair as unerringly as if guided by sight, she drew it close to Davenport, divining his position by some sixth sense, apparently. She sat down significantly, confidentially. In her hand she held some small object wrapped in white tissue paper.

"Morris, I've been so nervous about this all day," she began. "When I found you away this afternoon I was terribly disappointed."

"What's the trouble? Not that little thing in your hand?"

"Yes, this little thing. Wait till you see it."

She slowly unfolded the thin paper and lifted out a diamond ring of unusual size and brilliancy. Yet its sparkle scarcely surpassed that of the dark, eager eyes above it.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Morris," said she, in a guarded tone, "a woman brought that here this morning and wanted me to loan her two hundred dollars on it. I can't tell you her name, because that wouldn't be fair. But it is her engagement-ring, Morris, and she must need the money very badly. I know I should—to do that." She softly fingered the solitaire on her own hand a moment, and doubtless her mind was rambling back through half a century. "Yet I didn't let her have the money," she added, plaintively. "I wanted to see you first. I don't doubt her word as to the value of the ring, but I wanted to ask you if I had better do it."

Davenport took the ring and scrutinized the setting a moment. Then he quietly handed it back.

"That may have been some woman's engagement-ring, mother, but it wasn't Volley Congreve's," said he, briefly.

"Oh, Morris!" she cried. "I didn't mean for you to know. How did you guess?"

"That ring hung on Bradley Hayford's watch-chain for several months, and it was there when I last saw it."

"Then how did *she* get it?" demanded Mrs. Shipman, after an instant of astounded silence.

"I presume he gave it to her."

Mrs. Shipman's slender figure stiffened—it was always straight—and a bright-red spot appeared on each pale cheek.

"The hussy!" she exclaimed. "What right had she to accept such a present from him?"

"They are cousins," suggested Davenport, dryly.

"Cousins fiddlesticks! It took them a long time to find it out. No one ever heard much of their cousinship when she was an ungainly girl on the farm, working like a slave. To think that that woman would come here to my house and tell *me* that this was her engagement-ring! The cat!"

XXXIII

THE next instant her low, crooning laughter filled the room.

"Morris, I am running on just as if I hadn't lived in the same town with Volley Congreve for nearly twenty years. I ought to know her by this time. But she sha'n't have a cent, not a cent. Would you let her have a cent, boy?"

"I have let her have more than that, in times past," said he.

"I know—bless you. But would you—if you were I—under the circumstances?"

"It would depend on what she wanted it for."

"But what can she want with two hundred dollars?" asked the old lady, anxiously.

"She probably doesn't need that much just now. But the ring is worth that, and much more, if she only knew it; and as she can hardly expect to redeem it, she wants to get as near its value as possible."

"But I am not running a pawn-shop."

"I understood you were not."

She took his hand playfully, and was silent for a moment.

"Do you suppose, Morris, that her husband knows she is trying to borrow money on that ring?"

"Hardly."

"Do you suppose he knows she has it?"

"He may."

"Do you think he would let her keep it? I can't believe he would."

The Pride of Tellfair

"He might, if she insisted. He lets her do a good many things he doesn't like."

"Poor man!" exclaimed Mrs. Shipman. "But why didn't she go to you for the money?"

"She probably suspected that I would recognize the ring. Besides, she knew that she couldn't hoax me with any engagement story."

"As she did me," added Mrs. Shipman, gayly. She slowly wrapped the ring up again. "If I knew that she needed two hundred dollars, and that Harvey was willing for her to borrow it, I should let her have it, even after the lie she has told me. But I will not be a party to any deception. I'll give her back the ring, and if she really needs a little money—"

She broke off at the clang of the door-bell.

"Maybe that is she now!" she exclaimed.

Rejecting Davenport's offer to go and see, she arose and glided out into the hall. The maid had not yet lighted the ceiling lamp, but light and dark were one to Mrs. Shipman.

Davenport heard an exclamation of pleasure from her, and the next moment Josephine Priestley stepped into the room. Her ruddy cheeks and vigorous body exhaled the frosty air in which they had just been immersed, and seemed to electrify the room. Davenport sat at one side, screened by the door, and she did not see him at first. Laying down the music which she had come to return, she crossed the room with swift strides which made her skirts swirl like autumn leaves about her feet, and paused under a photograph of Davenport on the mantel-piece.

The picture had been taken when he was a boy, and was one of Mrs. Shipman's treasures. Josephine looked up at it fixedly for an instant. There was only the blind woman behind her—so she supposed. Her arm swiftly rose, and, before Davenport could realize what

The Pride of Tellfair

she was about, or betray his presence by some sound, she had pressed the card-board to her lips and replaced it again.

Then she turned. A visible tremor shot through her at sight of the man. She shrank from him, and the blood of shame rolled in a great flood up her neck and cheek, stained her snowy temples, and lapped the roots of her hair.

Davenport lifted a warning finger, and then quietly saluted her, aloud, for the benefit of Mrs. Shipman. She bowed, glanced at the door as if contemplating a dash for freedom, and then sat down. At first she struggled desperately to regain her ease. But her humiliation was too deep, and she finally resigned herself to it. Occasionally a flush would overspread her face, and then leave it pale and cold. She avoided Davenport's eye, and spoke only when she had to.

Davenport's heart ached for her. It was a cruel thing to surprise her love thus at its shrine—to lie in ambush and peep at her naked heart. Yet a great joy was bounding in his bosom, too, and he had a wild desire to go over and take her in his arms, confess their love to Mother Shipman, and ask her blessing.

When Mrs. Shipman left the room for a moment, Josephine laid all pretence aside and fixed her sorrowing eyes upon Davenport. He had likened her pride to a crown, and thought her queenly; but now her humility draped her like the black robe of a nun, and she was more than queen.

"Josie," said he, using the pet diminutive for almost the first time, "I never loved you till now!"

She made no answer, and Mrs. Shipman's return cut him off from any more. When Josephine arose to go, very soon, Davenport said he would walk home with her. She apparently assented, but at the foot of the long flight of steps descending to the street, she stopped.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I don't want you to go home with me," she said.

"I'm going, anyhow," said he, lightly, and drew her hand through his arm.

She withdrew it at once.

"I don't wonder that you think you can make me do as you please," said she.

"Don't be foolish. Do you mean to insinuate that I am taking advantage of what happened in there?"

"No man could help taking advantage of it," she answered, bitterly.

He eyed her steadily for a moment.

"I won't hold you to a strict accountability just now," said he, indulgently. "Let's go home. I was going to your house, anyhow."

But she still refused to move, and, looking down, played with her toe upon the sidewalk.

"I wonder just what you think of me," said she, finally.

"I think you are the sweetest girl in the world." He stole the finger-tips of one hand, and she pretended to be unaware of the theft.

"I suppose you would say that anyhow, feeling terribly sorry for a girl who had so far forgotten herself."

"No, I wouldn't."

"Do you think I went over to Mother Shipman's on purpose to do that?" she asked, desperately.

"Certainly not. Such a thought never crossed my mind," he protested. "Any one could see just how it happened—impulsively, on the spur of the moment."

"Suppose you believed that I went there with that in mind? I did it so quickly that you might—"

"That would have been another thing. But I couldn't have received such an impression. I know you too well. So don't worry any more."

He had her other hand by this time. She gave him

The Pride of Tellfair

a distressed look, tried to withdraw her hands, and then let her head droop in a shamefaced way.

"I must—I must tell you that I *did* go for that purpose!" she murmured.

Just how it happened neither could have told, but the next moment she was sobbing on his shoulder—there on the streets of Tellfair, at eight o'clock at night! One of his hands was about her waist; with the other he softly stroked her hair.

It lasted only a moment. Josephine drew away from him, wiped her eyes, and demurely pressed her hair into shape again.

"You can come along," said she, dispiritedly. "This has been a terribly unfortunate evening for me. I have something to tell you which would have been hard enough before. Now it is almost impossible. But I must do it. We agreed some weeks ago to be only friends, although we had confessed we were lovers. You have just seen how well we keep the agreement. We also agreed that you were to come to see me but once a week. You know how well we have kept that, too."

She gave him a mournful look.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, with a quivering sigh, "we have been so weak, and it was just because we courted temptation. We might have known we could not see each other so often and behave properly. And now the harm has been done."

"What harm?" ventured Davenport.

"Can't you see?" she asked, wistfully.

"No—not especially."

"You don't see any special harm in broken promises?"

"Not if the promises were foolish."

"Is it a foolish promise that keeps one's conscience clean and saves a woman's name from tarnish?"

"What woman's name has been tarnished?" he asked, gravely.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Mr. Bowman came to me last Sunday and warned me that by encouraging your attentions I was doing great harm to Bertha Congreve. Last night I had a talk with Bertha about it"—she felt him start—"and I am convinced that Mr. Bowman was right. I told her, Morris, that you and I could never, under the present circumstances, be more than friends, and that we both understood it so. I gave her my word, in effect, that we should not be more than that."

Davenport halted abruptly, and transfixed her with a stern eye.

"Then you told her a lie! You know that we are more than friends, and that all the promises in the world cannot change the fact, even though we put the earth between us."

"Oh, please don't be angry, dear!" she exclaimed, with a pleading hand upon his arm. "I am so sorry! But I could not help it. Had you been in my place, you would have done the same. I don't blame you. I don't blame anybody. It is one of those things that perhaps nobody could have helped. I only want to fix it now so that the harm will go no further—so that we shall never blame ourselves, and so that no one else can ever blame us."

"How are you going to do that? Order me to stay away?"

"No—*ask* you to stay away, dear. That is the only way."

"Even if it breaks my heart, I suppose."

"Do you think your heart would break sooner than mine?" she asked, gently. "I do not expect either to break. Neither of us is so weak as that."

They paused at the tall, sentinel-like gate-posts.

"Very well, I submit," said he, quietly, but the tenacity of a bull-dog lay on his lips. "How long am I to stay away?"

The Pride of Tellfair

"Until I tell you to come again."

"How long will that be?"

"I wish I could tell you," said she, smiling plaintively.

"Very well. Kiss me good-bye."

He drew her close, and kissed her slowly—once, twice, thrice.

XXXIV

VICTORIA bought a dozen oranges at Hemingway's, and asked the old man to charge them.

"Miss Priestley, I can't give your sister much more credit unless she pays something on account," answered the old man, bluntly. "It has been running three months now."

The sensitive girl, after an instant of stunned incredulity, recoiled with a red spot on each cheek as vivid as if made by the lash of a whip. Then, without a word, and scarcely conscious of what she did, she laid the bag of fruit on the counter and swiftly left the store.

Hi Hemingway, unpacking some goods in the rear of the store, paused with a can of corn in his hands.

"That's a hell of a nice break you made, father," said he, angrily.

The old man was staring conscience-stricken at the paper bag on the counter, but his graceless son's sharp attack threw him into an attitude of defence.

"It's a break that you will have to make very often, sir," he answered, harshly, "if you intend to keep very long the business your father will leave you when he dies."

Meanwhile, Victoria walked rapidly, almost breathlessly, homeward, ran into the house, and sobbed out her story to Josephine.

"Why, you foolish child!" said Josephine, laughing, and enclosing Victoria with her arms. "I thought something terrible had happened. That is only old man

The Pride of Tellfair

Hemingway's helpless way of saying he would like a little money. He's that way to everybody."

Nevertheless, she was paler; and ten minutes later Campeau, with solemn visage and short, rheumatic steps, was on the way down-town with a check for Chris Hemingway's account in full. It was a brave check, as written in Josephine's swinging hand; but it filched twenty-five dollars from the interest fund in the bank. And the interest was due in just seven days!

The girls were facing a financial crisis. During the summer they had been able to live and lay aside something towards the interest. But winter was coming on; coal and wood had to be bought, and some wraps and heavy underwear as well, for those which they brought with them from New Orleans were inadequate for Tellfair's more rigorous climate. And the interest was still one hundred dollars short!

The outlook sometimes filled Josephine with terror. Frequently, in the dead of night, when the moon was filling her room with a weird, creepy radiance, like the light from a dying sun, she would rise to her elbow and look at Victoria's placid, sleep-flushed face, with the pale hair strewn over temple and cheek. Josephine knew not what the uncertain future might bring to that sweet face. The best she could expect was lines of care, with the girlish love of life gone. And the worst— But she would not allow herself to think of the worst.

How easy it would be to checkmate that threatening future! Merely let go of herself and marry the man she loved. What booted it that people might talk? As the wife of Morris Davenport, they would soon come fawning back to her. And what real difference would it make to Bertha? Sharpen her pain for a little, perhaps, but mercifully shorten it. For Davenport could never be anything to her again.

But each time the monitor within warned her that the

The Pride of Tellfair

tempting fruit had a worm at its core; and as one turns from the brink of a precipice with the sickening fear that he may throw himself over against his will, so Josephine turned from thoughts of marriage with Davenport.

On the day following the Hemingway incident, the sisters went out to make some collections from their pupils. The work was new, and distasteful as well, and their faces were rather long. Victoria wanted them to make the rounds together, so as to bolster each other up, but the practical Josephine promptly vetoed this waste of time.

When they returned about six o'clock—Victoria at half-past five—and emptied their purses on the table, the heap of silver counted up fifteen dollars. It was about one-third of what they had outstanding. Victoria, whose nerves had reached their limit, gave a shriek of laughter.

"Tie it up in your stocking, Jo, and hang it in the well!" she cried, mockingly. "There are burglars in the land."

The hollow fun continued as they worked over their separate little account-books, giving proper credits and striking the puny balances in their favor. In their hearts, each was wondering how long the other could hold out. Then an unusual, an almost unprecedented thing happened. Old Jean entered and asked for money! Old Jean, whom they had unconsciously come to believe as independent of money almost as a spirit, so simple and so few⁷were his wants! A very little would do, he said, apologetically, as he stood at the door, hat in hand. Seventy-five cents would be enough. He had a little debt down-town for smoking-tobacco, and he needed a pair of gloves. Sawing wood was rather hard on gloves, and—

Josephine snatched up some coins from the table as blithely as though the little heap would magically re-

The Pride of Tellfair

plenish itself, like the widow's cruse, and stopped his apologies with a quick, nervous laugh.

"Never apologize to me again, Jean, when you come for money, unless you want to make me cry!" she said. The mist had already gathered in her eyes.

Campeau gravely counted out seventy-five cents and handed the rest back. More than this he respectfully but obstinately refused to accept. Then, thanking them, he left the room. With him went all the young ladies' hilarity.

His coming had jogged their memories. Time was when Campeau had, not wages, but a monthly allowance, for he was virtually a member of the family by reason of his long service. The allowance was generous, like everything else emanating from the open-handed Harold Priestley, and had enabled the frugal Jean, during the years, to lay away several thousand dollars. Then came the crash which laid the Priestley fortune low. Jean promptly, and as a matter of fact, tendered his savings to Mr. Priestley. They were kindly but firmly refused by the head of the house, who had no intention of pouring this precious gill of water into a thirsty bank of sand like his debts, and Jean had to wait for another day to show his loyalty.

The day soon came. It was during that black summer when horrid pestilence stretched its leathern, vampire wings over the Southern city and poisoned the air with its fetid breath; when some of the Priestleys lay dying and some dead; when business was prostrate and every man fierce for his dues. Then Campeau and his few thousands were the only barrier between the stricken family and the cohorts of neglect, hunger, and nakedness. Jean himself survived the shock and attrition of many a charge, but his savings melted away like ice in a boiling caldron.

It was the recollection of this which brought a lump

The Pride of Tellfair

to Josephine's throat as the old man stood before her apologizing for the pittance he had asked. For months she had given him scarcely anything. She had offered it, to be sure, and he had refused. But she knew why. She knew that he was supplying his simple wants by odd jobs about town—sawing wood, beating carpets, mowing lawns. He was too old for this work, and too rheumatic; but she dared not remonstrate, and scarcely dared take cognizance of it. She knew that the old man had a horror of proving a burden to her.

The two girls sat in silence, with the little heap of silver between them. Tears in Josephine's eyes always had a dispiriting effect upon Victoria, and she now sat very quiet and subdued. Josephine still held her pencil in her fingers, and still bent over her book; but the figures were only blurred outlines through the tears in her eyes. Finally she gave up trying to hide them. Lifting her brimming lashes to Victoria, she said, in a choking voice and with quivering lips and nostrils:

"I am a baby to cry this way, Vic, but my heart is so full that I just can't help it. Now I am going to tell you something. We *must* have money. That interest *must* be paid, and we *must* have some heavier clothing for winter. There is only one way to get it. That is for me to get on the train, go to Chicago, and sell our jewelry."

Victoria gasped and turned pale.

"Oh, Josie, this is terrible!"

"It's pretty bad. But not so bad as being in debt, or cold and hungry."

"What would people say if they knew?"

"I don't intend that they shall know, but, if they did, it would make no difference to me."

"Suppose Morris should hear of it."

"I'd sooner have him know it than some other people I could name."

"But wouldn't he think it strange, Jo, that we should

The Pride of Tellfair

go to such extremes for money when we could get it from him so easily?"

"Do you think we could get it so easily?" asked Josephine, significantly. Victoria understood, and said no more.

"Now go up-stairs and get our jewel-cases," said Josephine.

The cases were not heavy. All of the more valuable family jewels had been sacrificed two years before on the altar of Harold Priestley's debts. But Josephine made a fair foundation for the present sacrificial offering by stripping the rings from her fingers—every one of them, even to a frail band which she had worn almost to a thread and which was practically worthless. Victoria, with a whimper, followed suit, and then the silver cases were opened.

They culled out their own personal trinkets first; it was easier to give these up. But these constituted hardly a quarter of the contents. The rest were little keepsakes of the dead. Victoria shrank from the task, but Josephine resolutely lifted out a heavy bracelet bearing the name "Helen." Others followed—a ring of Honoria's, a chatelaine of Clementine's, a pin of Honoria's, another pin, a brooch of Helen's, and so on, until all of any value lay on the table.

She paused once over a baby's ring tied with a bit of blue ribbon. Then, with compressed lips, she lifted that out, too, and laid it on the heap. Victoria winced and blinked rapidly, but said nothing. Then, with another spasmodic movement, Josephine lifted a brooch of quaint construction. This time a cry of pain escaped Victoria's lips.

"Oh, Josie, that was mamma's!"

"I know it, dear. But if mamma could speak to us now, in our trouble, what do you think she would tell us to do?"

The Pride of Tellfair

"Won't there be enough without *that*?" asked Victoria, quiveringly. "We have given up almost everything else."

Josephine hesitated, and then, yielding to the cry of her own heart, put the brooch back.

"And Honoria's baby ring?" eagerly added Victoria.

Smiling and blinking, the elder sister put the little ring back also, as tenderly as if it still encircled the chubby, baby finger.

XXXV

TWO trains reached Tellfair from Chicago in the afternoon—one at half-past four, the other at half-past six. Victoria expected Josephine back on the first one, if all had gone well in the city, and was at the station a good twenty minutes ahead of time. She anxiously paced the platform and looked at her little silver watch—which was not worth selling—at least every two minutes.

Neither of the girls, in their innocence, had been at all sure of their ability to dispose of their jewelry. It was possible, according to them, for Josephine to be suspected of handling stolen goods, and even of being taken up for a thief. In fact, Victoria had a wild idea that the train might bring, instead of Josephine, an officer with a warrant for her (Victoria's) arrest, as an accomplice of her sister. She supposed that innocent people had suffered imprisonment thus before; indeed, she had read of such things in the papers. But if they were sent to jail, Morris Davenport would soon get them out, and make somebody smart for it as well.

In her heart, of course, Victoria knew that all this speculation was nonsense. Yet she experienced genuine relief when Josephine stepped off the train. Moreover, she had a large bundle under her arm. That told of success. In that bundle, Victoria knew, were warm things and pretty things— But it shall not be opened here.

"Where did you sell them?" she almost whispered.

"In a pawn-shop," answered Josephine.

The Pride of Tellfair

Victoria gasped. Her blue eyes were a study as she stared half horrified at her sister, with visions in her mind of a tumble-down den in the heart of Chicago's slums, the haunt of outcasts and thieves.

When Josephine, in the security of the house, showed the pawn-ticket, Victoria was surprised to find it white and clean; but she still eyed it with suspicion and took it in her hands very gingerly, as if fearing contagion.

"But how could you ever go in, Josie?" she asked, admiringly.

"A pawn-shop is nothing like what you and I have always supposed it—at least, this one wasn't. It was as clean as this room, and looked like a first-class jewelry-store. A policeman told me where to go. While I was there a carriage drove up to the door, and an elegantly dressed woman came in. She was heavily veiled though," she added.

"How much did you get for them all?"

"Two hundred and fifty dollars."

Victoria clapped her hands in glee, and Josephine withheld her opinion that the keepsakes were worth at least twice that amount.

When the big bundle had been duly opened, and the contents sorted, paired off, matched, fondled, exclaimed over, and in some instances tried on, Victoria said:

"We are invited over to Catlin's to-night to some kind of doings. I told Elizabeth we should come if you weren't too tired."

"I am awfully tired, but I suppose we ought to go."

They did not go, however, and they had a better excuse for remaining at home than Josephine's fatigue. It, the excuse, came in on the half-past six train from Chicago, and registered at the Basley House.

He was a man of perhaps forty-five. When he laid his silk hat on the rack at the dining-room door, he uncovered a head of black hair which time had distinctly

The Pride of Tellfair

thinned. Yet the brown eyes behind his gold nose-glasses were as bright and alert as a squirrel's. There was scarcely a wrinkle on his face, and not a streak of gray in his mustache or foreign-looking imperial.

He looked decidedly "Frenchy" to the staff of chair-warmers in the office; and when they moved to the register, upon the guest's departure for the dining-room, and inspected his name, they pronounced him French beyond a doubt. "Zénobe Chouinard, New Orleans," was what the stranger had signed, in a microscopic hand. Discussion as to the pronunciation of the name followed, but the majority finally agreed with Red McGowan that "Chewinard" was the common-sense pronunciation, and doubtless the correct one.

"You're wrong, Red," piped up a nervous little man. "I used to know a family by that name, and it's pronounced 'Shoonawr.'"

McGowan gave his insignificant critic a contemptuous stare, and then burst into a guffaw.

"What the hell are you givin' us, Tibbets?" he asked, roughly, and swaggered back to the card-table.

The sensitive Tibbets sank into a chair. His shame and chagrin must have been intense to nerve him to the deed which followed; for no sooner had the Frenchman emerged from the dining-room than Tibbets, to the amazement of everybody, stepped up to him and said:

"Excuse me, sir, but the boys have had a little argument about your name, and I claimed it was pronounced 'Shoonawr.' Would you mind telling me if that is right?"

Chouinard lighted the cigarette which he had drawn from a case, took a puff or two, and eyed his interrogator through his glasses. It looked very much as if Spencer Tibbets was in for a second snub. However, the stranger answered quietly, even politely, "Yes, my name is commonly pronounced that way by Americans."

The Pride of Tellfair

He slipped into a light overcoat, just the cut of which had never before been seen in Tellfair, and walked out. After two or three deep inhalations, he filiped his cigarette into the street, and lit a very small, very black cigar. This he also smoked rapidly, but it was not half consumed when he tossed it away at the Priestley gate. He stood and looked at the house for a moment before entering, with a peculiar smile on his handsome face, and softly stroked his jetty mustache.

Victoria opened the door. For a moment she blinked uncertainly into the darkness. Then, with a sharp cry, she sprang forward into the gentleman's arms, and was promptly kissed. The commotion brought Josephine into the hall. She, too, after a gasp of astonishment, let slip a little joyous cry and sprang forward. But she gave him her hands only, and he did not attempt to kiss her.

What a night that was! They drew the curtains tight, to shut out the village—just as they used to do in the old days, when the village was almost an unknown country to them—and then flew on the wings of memory back into the past. Chouinard had a busy time of it. Where was Delphine? And Eugénie? No, Eugénie Joncaire—not Delaroche. But where was Eugénie Delaroche, also? And Hortense was married—at last! And Coralie—had she really gone to a convent? Married instead? Oh, the sly little minx! And two children—marvellous! And Clarisse—he certainly remembered Clarisse—how many children had she? Clarisse had none—that is, one, and was in heaven with it. Ah! Tears sprang into the girls' eyes. But so tender had been their joy that this sorrow jarred not against it; and the next moment, at another tidbit from Chouinard, they smiled through their tears.

Then Chouinard recalled his former visits to Tellfair, eight, nine, and ten years before. Had they been out

The Pride of Tellfair

to—what was it called?—the Weech's Caldron lately? No! Then they must go to-morrow. He would hire a carriage. Did they remember the time dear Helen ruined her gown with the coffee, out there, on the picnic? And how provoked Antonio became because they insisted that he was to blame, by keeping so close to her!

Next he wanted to know what the girls were doing—if they were happy, or ever got homesick for the South. They told him about their pupils, and laughed over the prices they got for lessons. They confessed to attending a Protestant church, and said they liked it, when Chouinard drolly called them apostates. Josephine told about her public singing, and Victoria, in anything but a sad tone, related her sad experience at cooking. They talked about the Reverend Mr. Bowman, Mrs. Bowman, old Campeau—whom Chouinard insisted on having called in at once—and Mrs. Shipman, Mr. Congreve, and others. Victoria mimicked some of the village characters until the tears ran down their visitor's cheeks, and Josephine's funny anecdotes were endless. In fact, they told him about everything—except the pawn-ticket in the bottom of the old clock.

"Ah, you are having good times," sighed Chouinard, "and you will soon forget the old friends in the South!"

"No, no!" said Josephine, quickly. "We shall never do that."

She felt that they had been deceiving him with their hilarity. Yet she instantly regretted a certain impulsiveness in the last remark. It had brought an expression into Chouinard's eyes which she would rather not have evoked. It was an expression she had seen there before.

Chouinard had no exact knowledge of the resources of the girls, though he knew these could not be great; and he was too truly polite to use even his eyes now to inform

The Pride of Tellfair

himself. But some things he could not help seeing. The girls were well gowned; the piano still occupied the music-room; the old, costly furniture was strewn about; Victoria got out her tea-set and made tea, as of yore; and, later, fruit and cakes were served. Surely this was not poverty.

How could Chouinard, being a man, remember that he had seen those same gowns on their dead sisters? It escaped his mind that the piano was now a tool for earning bread. And how could he know that old Campeau had been secretly despatched for the fruit after the guest's arrival?

The next morning the trio drove out to the Witch's Caldron. Many picnickers had been there since that distant day when Helen had spilled the coffee on her gown, but the same altar-like pile of stones on which the coffee had been boiled was still there. And high above, on the summit of the heap of great rocks, from which one could see miles and miles of prairie, with Rock River laid across it like a ribbon, the initials of the happy party of that summer day could still be read. Josephine's throat ached as she looked. Yet she was also thinking of that later day when Davenport, taking her out to see his parents' home, had offered to drive over here.

Chouinard took dinner with the girls—they called it lunch, for the sake of old times. At the first opportunity after the meal he led Victoria aside.

"You used to be a very accommodating little girl, Vic," said he, taking both her hands in his. "Have you forgotten the art yet? I want to talk to Josie for a little while alone, and I want you to keep out of the way. Will you do it?"

His manner was significant, and Victoria looked at him questioningly. Then, nodding an affirmative, she ran away. She loved Zénobe Chouinard, and thought

The Pride of Tellfair

him one of the best of men. Yet she was sorry he had spoken.

"Josephine," said Chouinard, when they were alone, "I don't know whether you have suspected my errand to the North or not. I hope you have. Last night I fancied that you had."

His heart might well have melted at the picture before him. Always beautiful, there were times when Josephine was fairly glorified by a matchless poise and expression. This was one of the times. She knew what was coming; but she must wait, being a woman, until he had spoken. She could neither hurry him nor stop him, and thus save her feelings. So there she sat, as impartial as Justice herself. When he paused, she gravely lowered her eyes to the floor.

"I am twenty years older than you, Josie," he continued. "I am old enough to be your father. I have long loved you and Victoria as a father loves his children. That, I believe, you know. Yet I have also loved you in another way for what seems a long time to me—for nearly five years. I hesitated to tell you so while you were in New Orleans. There were younger men around you who might perhaps have made you happier than I could. But now you have left them all behind, and, had you left your heart with one of them, I think I should have heard of it before this. You have come up here, where I presume it is unlikely that you will meet a man suited to you by birth and social training. An alien race is around you. Is it presumptuous for me to come forward now and ask you to become my wife?"

"My dear friend," said she, in a voice rich with emotion, "I cannot marry you."

"Why—if I may ask?" said he, gently.

"Because I do not love you as you love me."

"I hardly expected that you could," said he, quietly.

"But can you not learn to love me? I would cut off my

The Pride of Tellfair

right hand rather than shatter one of your youthful illusions, my dear girl; but I have lived long enough to know that love is not merely a matter of affinity or destiny. We love those who are good and kind to us, who share our aspirations and pleasures and philosophy of life. We love those with whom we have long been associated, provided they are right-minded people, and not out of our sphere. Love is a plant. Given proper soil, and watered and cared for daily, it thrives and grows to maturity. It doesn't spring into lusty being at some magic touch. I think I could intelligently care for such a plant. What I am personally, you know. You respect me, I hope; and you admire me—I have been told—a little."

"Very, very much," she interpolated.

"I can give you and Victoria a home. I can give you the luxuries to which you have long been accustomed. I can take you back into a society where you both are loved and honored, among a people who share your traditions, blood, custom, and history. Victoria would certainly have a better chance of marrying happily there than here. You must both sometimes be lonely here. You must sometimes hunger for the social and intellectual advantages of your old home. From what you have told me, I know that you both work hard. It is a beautiful, a grand thing to see two delicately nurtured girls rise so heroically to the occasion, and, refusing to brood over their almost unparalleled disasters, go to work, as you have done, for a living. Yet, if you will pardon me, it is also a pathetic sight. It is not your proper work. Some man ought to be doing that for you. He could do it so much better than you, at so much less cost, and leave you leisure for higher, nobler things. Will you not let me be that man?

"I do not want to bribe you. I would not have you as a purchase, and I speak thus plainly because I know

The Pride of Tellfair

you would not come as a purchase. But these are weighty things, and must be considered. Their absence or their presence does much to make or to mar love in any case. People are just as human after marriage as before, and chafe just as much under bonds: If you don't love me now in just the way that I love you, if you only feel kindly towards me, is not everything in your favor for learning to love me later? And if ever a man strove to win a woman's love, that man will be Zénobe Chouinard. I will strive for it as I would strive for immortality—because it would be immortality for me. It would give me a seat with the angels, here and hereafter."

He saw, with a thrill, that his words were not without effect. Josephine had grown pale, and the hand which lay in his was as cold as ice. If these signs of a powerful emotion touched his heart, and made his conscience hint that his mode of attack was not quite fair, he quieted the latter with the assurance that he truly believed all that he had said, and had only her good in mind.

With the image of Morris Davenport before her, Josephine had at first turned a deaf ear to Chouinard. But as the latter went on, so kindly and so earnestly, it had flashed over Josephine that she had no right to stop her ears with thoughts of Davenport's love. For if true to herself, to Bertha, and to even Davenport himself, she could never marry him. That was why she had turned pale.

"I want you to think over carefully what I have said," Chouinard continued, quietly, "because I believe it means much to us both. I shall not leave this evening, as I intended, but will wait until to-morrow evening. That will give you time enough, will it not?"

She nodded, vaguely, like one in a dream.

"Very well. Whatever decision you reach, I will sub-

The Pride of Tellfair

mit to without a word. Remember that. I have stated my case in full. But please think it over very, very carefully," he added, pleadingly.

He softly rose. She did not move, but continued to gaze at the floor. As if loath to disturb her, he silently pressed her hand and slipped away.

XXXVI

CHOUINARD'S words, distasteful as they were, sank into Josephine's understanding like a subtle poison. Tellfair, like an ugly masquerader deftly unmasked, was suddenly revealed to her in all its dulness, littleness, and meanness; and its dwarfing, deadening limitations seemed already to press upon her.

But the phrase which rang through her consciousness over and over again, and made her pride cower, was, "Yet it is also a pathetic thing"! Those cruel words, to describe the efforts she had thought so noble! They crashed down through her to the very roots of hope, knocked the last prop from under her sinking spirits, and made her work only despicable drudgery. They ruthlessly tore her from the little pedestal she had innocently raised for Victoria and herself, and flung her down among the common, toiling millions. Her labors and sacrifices were not giving her the strength and hardihood she had so fondly imagined, but were merely grinding out of her what it had taken generations of wealth, leisure, and culture to put in.

There was something so cruel, so maddening in the thought that she gave a little wail of misery. Then, angrily lifting her head, with flashing eyes she said, aloud, "It's a lie, a trap, a dastardly snare!"

But she knew it was not. She knew that Zénobe Chouinard truly loved her, and would set no such thing for her. True, he could be mistaken; but somehow the dread words took hold of her mind fiercely as her heart

The Pride of Tellfair

fought against them. Had she not herself at first been afraid of deteriorating? Had not she and Victoria openly talked it over? What were these words of Chouinard's but this same truth in another form?

All the old fears were now awake and clamoring. If she had ceased to regard herself as superior to the villagers, it was only because she was sinking to their level, she reflected; and not, as she had proudly thought, because she had broadened. She had attended a concert the week before—one of the numbers on Tellfair's lecture course. As her mind ran back to the dingy hall, and the disorderly boys in the rear—howling, whistling, and spitting on the floor—and the excruciating chairs, she was fairly sick. When she recalled that she had really enjoyed the entertainment—she who had listened to the glories of grand opera in a palatial opera-house—a wave of shame passed over her. Was this to be her fate? Was she to live and die, knowing nothing henceforth better than this, and to be *satisfied* with it? Was she, at twenty-four, to have the best of life behind her?

How contemptible was everything around her! She recalled with loathing the petty jealousies, the gossip and scandal-mongering. None so pure as to escape the mud of slander. The best people in Tellfair had been spotted, and very likely she herself among them. Here was a clique, and there a clique. Here the band, there the Ladies' Schubert Club. The two editors of the town shot their columns almost weekly with ironies, if not open abuse, and fired them at each other's heads. Even the churches took sly pokes at one another. It was all very unlovely, depressing, and squalid.

Even Morris Davenport came in for his share of this bitter and unjust mood. His enemies were as thick as cloverheads in June. There were men in Tellfair who would spend ten dollars to keep him from making one

The Pride of Tellfair

—although they seldom kept him from it. There were men who called him thief—yea, libertine. She knew that these were lies, and that it was not his fault if he occasionally drew a blade in self-defence. Yet what had Morris really done but make money? And thousands of men in the cities had made more of that than he.

Yet she was now upon a dangerous theme — for Zénobe Chouinard's suit. It was precisely at this point that something within her began to rebel and cry out against her injustice. Through the mist of bitterness and despair all about her, the reddish-brown eyes of Davenport shone tranquilly, with that sense of power, that easy confidence, which never failed to uplift her, in some magic way, and make her think more of herself and mankind.

That night she had a dream. The scene was Zénobe Chouinard's great house. Guests were flocking in and out. Jasmine and orange freighted the air with their languorous breath. The soft, sensuous strains of a hidden orchestra floated through the rooms. Jewels, bright eyes, and the white arms and breasts of fair women flashed against the black coats of the men. She, Josephine Chouinard, the bride of an hour, stood in the centre of it all, bowing and smiling at the old, familiar faces.

Yet something about the guests was not familiar. A spell of some kind lay over them. They whispered strangely and impolitely to one another, and advanced and receded in a noiseless, stealthy way. Then, too, Clarisse was among them—Clarisse, who was in heaven with her babe. That was most strange. But more disturbing than all this was a black-robed figure which stood half concealed among the palms in an anteroom. Man or woman, she knew not. It never came forward, never went away, but drifted about among the palms like an uneasy shade of the dead.

The Pride of Tellfair

Finally, filled with a nervous dread, Josephine whisperingly asked an old girl friend who the strange guest might be. The girl lifted her head incredulously, laughed rudely in Josephine's face, and turned on her heel.

A moment later, by one of those sudden transitions common in dreams, Josephine found herself alone. Not a guest, not even her husband, was in sight, and an appalling silence had fallen over the house. But, to her great alarm, there was the apparition still among the palms.

In desperation, Josephine approached it. She now saw that it was a man, and, hoping to conciliate him, she asked, in her sweetest tones, if he would not like to see her new home. He gravely nodded assent, and, with a fast-beating heart, she led him from room to room, peering ever about for her husband, or a lingering guest, or even a servant. But no one was in sight. Even the kitchen was deserted.

"Now I have shown you all," said she, as they halted in the anteroom again. "Shall I call your carriage?"

"All!" he said, in a sepulchral voice that sent her heart into her throat. "Where is your bridal-chamber, woman?"

"My—my what?" she gasped, but she had heard him well.

"Your bridal-chamber," he repeated, threateningly.

"Why—why, I had not thought of that," she answered, with a little hysterical laugh. "How strange! I—I have only been married an hour. But here it is."

He gazed gloomily into the dimly lighted apartment, rich with rugs and tapestries, glancing with mirrors, and heavy with perfume.

"She had not thought of it!" he mused, sardonically. Then, suddenly lifting a pair of burning eyes and pointing within with outstretched arm, he said, sternly, "*This*

The Pride of Tellfair

is the beginning and the end. This is the substance. All else is shadow."

Trembling to her knees, she followed him back to the front door. Then, to her horror, she recognized Morris Davenport. Not the blithe, sunny Davenport of Tellfair, but a gloomy, black, ghastly Davenport.

Thoughtless of her bare arms and shoulders in the chill night air, she sprang down the steps after him. For what seemed miles and miles she followed him, crying pitifully with every step for him to stop. At last, by mighty effort, she caught his hand, for he now seemed to tower high above her.

He stopped and regarded her sternly for a moment.

"Madam, you are another man's wife," he said, harshly, and shook her off and left her there on her knees.

"Oh, my God, what have I done!"

She was sitting up in bed, with a wildly beating heart, these words still on her lips. She at first imagined herself still in Zénobe Chouinard's house; ay, in his bed. But as one familiar object after another dawned on her dilated eyes, and she realized that she was in Tellfair, in her own home and room, still Josephine Priestley, she gave a sob of relief, and murmured fervently and solemnly, "Oh, thank God, thank God!"

Victoria stirred. The thanks died on Josephine's lips and in her heart. She remembered that she still had a sister who could not be sacrificed, whatever she chose to do with herself. Still trembling and excited, she buried her face in the pillow and humbly asked God to show her the way.

The morning sun dispelled her hallucination and her weakness. She attacked the problem again with steady nerves and a clear head. But an unexpected factor—an absurd factor, indeed—now came into play. She discovered that she could not perfectly recall Daven-

The Pride of Tellfair

port's features, familiar as they were. Try as she would to prevent it, the figure of her dream would slip its dark and sinister visage between her mind's eye and Davenport, producing a distorted image. She was first amused, then annoyed, then troubled. By ten o'clock she had an almost irresistible desire to see Davenport, just to correct this absurd aberration of her memory. By half-past ten she was on the way to his office, with a check for the interest in her purse, although she had fully intended to mail it to him. It would serve as an excuse for her call.

Davenport's eyes — the same old Davenport — first opened wide with surprise at sight of her, and then lighted with pleasure. But when she quietly advanced and laid down the interest check, the light faded from his eyes.

He knew two things—first, that she was in no position to pay the interest from her earnings; second, that Chouinard was in town. It was no reflection on his acuteness, therefore, when he jumped to the conclusion that the money had come from the Creole. That it had been borrowed in due form, and probably secured, he had no doubt. Nor did he suppose that the transaction rested on any other basis than friendship. But it stung him that Josephine should have gone to another than himself for help.

She, on her part, had come in the tenderness of her heart to make sure that his beloved face was not drawn with pain, and now he was looking coldly upon her. Thus, in an instant, a subtle barrier had reared itself between them.

"Bradley Hayford was in to see me a few days ago," he observed, as he wrote a receipt. "He wants to buy a stock-farm west of town, and says he will need the money he has out on your mortgage. Any one of half a dozen clients of mine will be glad to assume the mortgage, and

The Pride of Tellfair

at a lower rate of interest than it now bears—five per cent. instead of six. It is possible, though, that you know where you can do still better, or where, for any other reason, you would prefer to place the mortgage. I thought I ought to bring it to your attention."

What concealed imp in his heart prompted that speech! Josephine started, and then looked him steadily in the eye.

"What do you mean—Morris?" she asked, quietly.

"You came near calling me Mr. Davenport," said he, playfully, instantly penitent, and trying to divert her.

"Would you prefer that I should place the mortgage myself?" she asked, ignoring his advances.

"Prefer fiddlesticks, Josephine! Of course I wouldn't prefer it. I simply thought I ought to ask you."

She studied him for a moment with puzzled, disappointed eyes.

"Where could I possibly place it?" she asked.

Was she trying to deceive him? He could not believe it; yet the demon of jealousy made him answer, "In the same quarter, I thought, perhaps, that this money came from."

She looked at him blankly for a moment, and then the truth flashed over her. With it came a rush of blood to her face. For a moment the secret of the interest money trembled on her lips. But she was too deeply wounded. He was not worthy of the confidence. In her confusion, she handed him back the receipt and arose to go. Then, remembering that the business was not settled yet, she sat down again.

"Josephine, I did not mean to hurt you," said he, humbly. "I really thought that you might prefer to place the mortgage there. You have a perfect right to do so, you know. It is simply a matter of business."

"Morris, did you ever find me unduly willing to accept favors from your hands?" she asked, passionately.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Never. Always the other way."

"If I wouldn't accept favors from you, do you suppose I could accept them from any other man?"

"Haven't you?" he asked, puzzled.

She looked at him with a sad, piteous smile.

"You love me, Morris, but—you don't know me. I have not. Good-bye. I shall leave the mortgage to you because—because you are in my pay."

"Josephine, come back!" he commanded.

"I can't come back. I am too hurt."

"If you don't come back, I shall go with you."

She obeyed, reluctantly.

"Josie," he began, earnestly, "I have had every reason to believe that you were by your own efforts unable to raise that interest. I don't want to betray a confidence, but that good old man at your house—Campeau—has expressed great anxiety to me about it. An old friend comes to visit you—a friend amply able to help you, as I happen to know. What more natural than that I should assume that he had helped you?"

"Yes, it was natural—not knowing me," she murmured.

"I *do* know you," he declared, earnestly. "I know what a brave, proud girl you are, and I didn't suppose for a minute that you had accepted any favor from him that couldn't be classified as business."

She still shook her head, as if to repeat that he did not know her.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"No. I want you to forgive me."

"I can't forgive you yet," she answered, with hot eyes. "But I will—I will."

"Consider my position, Josephine," said he, pleadingly. "I have promised not to come to see you again. Can't you imagine my feelings if you leave me in this way?"

The Pride of Tellfair

This to her who was even then considering an offer of marriage from another man! Had he, after all, wronged her as much as she had wronged him? Was it not she, rather than he, who should be suing for forgiveness? The old tenderness flooded her eyes.

"I am not angry, Morris, but I can't force my heart," she said, gently. "You wouldn't want mere words. But I have almost forgiven you. When I have done so completely, I will write you a little note. It shall be very soon."

In the outer office she paused to speak to Bertha, but the young woman was distant and cold. All recollection of their last tender interview seemed to have passed from her mind.

When Josephine stepped out into the hall, she would have liked to lean her head against the wall and cry. Through all her struggles in the months gone by, in her very darkest hours, the image of Davenport had loomed before her like a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The love and trust of this strong, courageous man had been an inexpressible comfort to her. His fearless, tender eye would come to her at the most unexpected times like a benediction. Others might fail her, but he never. And should the worst come, should every other refuge be closed against her, should this bread-winning fight end in defeat, she could fly to him without shame and be saved.

But now! Ah, the bitterness of it! Even he had doubted her. The ground seemed to slip beneath her feet, and in her misery she turned to Chouinard, the friend of her father and her childhood. Traitorous thoughts filled her mind, and she went over the ground again of the day before. She knew her mood was reckless, and in very madness she wished she might meet Chouinard at that moment and let him fix her halting decision beyond recall.

The Pride of Tellfair

She met, instead, a Mrs. Hanson, whose daughter was one of Josephine's most promising pupils. Mrs. Hanson stopped her, and after a little preliminary sparring gave her a body blow by announcing that Mr. Hanson had decided to give Elsa no more lessons at present.

"Aren't you satisfied with my teaching?" asked Josephine, haughtily.

"It ain't exactly that, Miss Priestley, because her voice certainly is improved. But her father, Mr. Hanson, seems to think she ought to be singin' classical music by this time, or something like that—which of course she ain't, you know." She smiled, kindly.

Josephine's nostrils curled scornfully. Here was some more village ignorance.

"The song she is studying now, Mrs. Hanson, is one of Charles Gounod's. Doesn't your husband consider that classical?"

"Well, I suppose he meant opries and such—pieces like the 'Holy City,' you know. I would love to have Elsa singin' that piece, myself. Now, Miss Webster, over at Marysville, gave that piece to Susie Lasalle in her second month, and she does real well at it. She sung it at a G. A. R. camp-fire not long ago, and both the papers spoke of it."

"Miss Webster's methods and mine are different, then," answered Josephine, brusquely. "I studied three years before my teacher gave me a song of that character. He was one of the best in Paris, and he charged five dollars a lesson."

Mrs. Hanson looked helpless under these figures.

"Of course, I ain't findin' fault with your methods, Miss Priestley. I'm sorry her father—"

"Oh, it makes no difference to *me*," said Josephine, quickly. "I'm only sorry for the girl. She has an unusual voice, and I hate to see it ruined by some ignorant person. So far as I am concerned, it isn't likely

The Pride of Tellfair

that I shall teach much longer. In fact, my sister and I are thinking of returning to New Orleans."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Mrs. Hanson, brightening at this unexpected bit of news and change of subject. "I hadn't heard of it. It's quite sudden, isn't it?"

Josephine said that it was, rather, and then retreated out of range of further questions. Five rods distant she stopped, conscience-stricken, and turned to look at Mrs. Hanson's rapidly disappearing figure. For a moment she was tempted to pursue the woman and retract her words. But her pride balked.

"Fool! fool! fool!" she exclaimed, bitterly. "In twenty-four hours that story will have gone the rounds of the town."

As she was laying off her hat, Victoria came into the hall.

"What's the matter, Jo?" asked the latter, scenting trouble.

"Victoria, Mr. Chouinard has asked me to marry him," said she, with a hard glitter in her eyes.

"I supposed yesterday that he would."

"I am in doubt what to tell him."

Victoria looked at her sister wonderingly. She was not ignorant of some of the passages between Josephine and Davenport.

"Do you love him?" she asked, quietly.

"No."

"Then why should you be in doubt?"

"For that very reason, and because I do love you, and myself, and don't like to be poor, and driven like a slave by necessity."

"But you can't marry a man that you don't love," answered Victoria, with a finality that seemed to settle the question then and there, for all time.

Josephine looked at her for a moment in silence. In

The Pride of Tellfair

the light of those pure, blue eyes Chouinard's plausible words seemed empty, mocking, and profane. She suddenly placed her arm around Victoria's neck and kissed her. It was not affection alone which made her cling so tight. It was the feeling that she had hold of a rock of refuge.

"No, I can't," she answered, peacefully.

And that is what she told Chouinard when he came in the afternoon.

XXXVII

IN this day of steam and electricity the advantages of a great city are shared in a measure by the small-town dwellers for many miles around. Bradley Hayford, for instance, never missed Chicago's annual horse-show, and a prize-fight at Tattersall's could hardly have been "pulled off" without his burly presence. He occasionally served in an official capacity at the latter, and his picture had once appeared in a pink sporting paper.

Returning from a fight in June, he had brought with him, on his watch-chain, a ring set with a large diamond. He had accepted it, he said, in lieu of cash, from a broken-down sport, in settlement of a bet on the fight. It was a woman's ring, and doubtless could have told a sad enough story of its own. But of that Bradley knew nothing and thought less.

The ring instantly caught Volley Congreve's magpie eye for anything that glittered; and when she discovered that it was a perfect fit for one of her fingers, Bradley used to let her wear it, childlike, when they were out riding together.

"Volley, you needn't take that ring off this time," said Hayford. "I'm going to make you a present of it."

They were returning from Brandon, ten miles distant, where he had gone to look at some horses. It was dusk, and the electric lights of Tellfair were twinkling across the purple prairie.

"Do you mean it?" she asked, flushing with pleasure.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Sure," he answered, bluffly.

"It is splendid of you, Bradley!" she exclaimed. The next moment, though, she looked up into Hayford's face with eyes that gleamed daringly in the dark, and added, "What do you suppose Harvey will say?"

"What could he say? Haven't I give you things before?" he asked, bluntly.

"Nothing as valuable as this."

"It didn't cost *me* anything. Easy come, easy go."

"Harvey is so peculiar, and he gets worse every day. I don't believe he would let me keep the ring, if he knew. But I am going to keep it," she added, quickly, at an impatient motion from him. "Only, we won't say anything to him just yet about it. That is, *you* mustn't. Then, some time, when he's in the right mood, I'll tell him."

"I don't know what he could kick about," grumbled Hayford. "I don't fancy giving a gift that way."

Volley was callous herself, but even she shrank from this flintiness—this complaining at a husband for not allowing his wife to accept a five-hundred-dollar stone from another man. But her shrinking was not visible.

"Don't blame me, Bradley," said she, plaintively. "I can't help it. Harvey is a cripple, and very sensitive. You know what I think of you, and that I value that ring as much as anything I have—not for its intrinsic value, but because it comes from you."

There was no heart in the words, though, and she had to smile at her own clumsy cajolery. There had been a time when she fancied she liked Hayford; but of late, since he had begun to show decidedly that he liked her, she had discovered that it was only his horses and free-handedness that she liked.

His arm lay on the back of the seat. A moment later he dropped his hand upon her shoulder. It was the first time he had ever taken such a liberty, and she

The Pride of Tellfair

glanced up quickly to see if the act were intentional. The amorous face which blocked her vision showed her that it was. She dropped her eyes and waited, like a skilful player in a game.

"Don't I get more than thanks for that, Volley?" he asked, rather wondering at the pounding within his great, iron-muscled chest.

She turned her head slightly away, but at the same time yielded to the pressure of the arm which brought her nearer him. Her conscience was as frayed as a worn rope's-end, but it still performed its functions after a fashion, and now warned her to beware.

"You mustn't," said she, with cheeks of scarlet. It was her first overt sin with him.

"Just once," he pleaded. "It's certainly worth one. Nobody will ever know."

She fought him off a little longer, but merely out of coquetry, for she had already made up her mind that it would be policy to yield. Then, with a swift, instinctive glance over the darkening fields for any chance onlooker, she lifted her lips and received his unhallowed kiss. She was as passionless as a stone; her lips were cold, and the kiss lifeless. It chilled Hayford's ardor, apparently—disappointed his riotous anticipations. The rest of the way, as straight and level as the bed of a railroad, was passed in silence. If anything could be gathered from Hayford's stolid face, he was inwardly cursing himself for his impulsive generosity, and no doubt repeating to himself one of his favorite maxims—that "love is not what it's cracked up to be."

As Volley climbed from the buggy, unaided, at her gate, she said, with forced emotion, "It was very sweet of you, Bradley, to give me that ring."

At first she carefully screened the costly gift from Harvey's eye, but wore it constantly when she went down-town, slipping it on at the door, and taking it off

The Pride of Tellfair

there when she returned. Then she told "Bert" about it—from a desire, no doubt, to divide the responsibility.

The indifference with which her daughter received her confession eased Volley's conscience considerably, and it was not long before she had a desire to try the same thing on her husband. But cripple though he was, neglected and hoodwinked every day, there was something about him which even his bold and hardy mate feared, and she approached the delicate task with all the caution of her catlike nature. She put on the ring and entered his study, carelessly. But he did not notice the ring that day, or the next, or even the third, although she flashed it in his very eyes.

The fourth day, resolved to be done with it, she sat down at the table opposite him, and dropped her jewelled hand naturally upon the green cloth. The glittering bait lay there for five minutes, all unseen by its victim, while Volley's heart thumped considerably harder than usual. Then there came a moment when she knew, without turning her head, that he had seen it; and although not a muscle of her well-schooled face moved, her gray eyes dilated just the least.

"Volley, where did you get that ring?" he asked, abruptly.

"What ring? Oh, that diamond?" She yawned and patted her lips with the jewelled hand. "That's Bradley's. He let me wear it for a while."

She said it so carelessly, with such finished art and coolness, that one would have thought it had been easy for her to add, "He said I might have it if I wanted it." But those words were utterly beyond her power, for in a moment she would have to meet those clear, brown eyes of her blameless husband. At that instant she hated those eyes, for they had made a coward of her; but she feared them none the less for that.

"Is that the ring he won at the prize-fight?"

The Pride of Tellfair

"Yes."

"When did he let you have it?"

"Several days ago." It was actually several weeks.

"Give it back to him the first time you see him, and never wear it again."

"What harm is there in my wearing it?" she asked, resentfully.

"There might be great harm. Have you worn it on the street?"

"Once or twice." She quailed before his next words, and regretted having admitted that tithe of the truth.

"Don't you know better than that?" he asked, sharply. "Don't you know that such a thing as that might get you talked about?"

"It never crossed my mind," she answered, truthfully. "Nobody knows that it is his ring; and, even if they did, they know he's my cousin. You are so suspicious of people, Harvey," she continued, complainingly. "You are always saying that we ought to trust people if we want them to trust us, and yet you never do it."

"Such a piece of foolhardiness as that is not trusting people," he answered, severely. "It is tempting them. Give the ring back to Bradley the first time you see him, and never put it on your finger again."

"Suppose I refuse?" she asked, boldly.

"I don't think you will," he answered, quietly, and she knew that she would not. But she knew also that she would deceive him, and she left the room with a heart full of rage.

She hid the ring away for two or three weeks. Then, fired with a new idea, she took it to Mrs. Shipman to effect a loan on it. Tricky and suspicious as she was herself, she never overcame a fatuous trust in others. When Mrs. Shipman refused to make the loan, without saying just why, the ring again went into hiding. A week later Volley suddenly resolved to take it to Chicago

The Pride of Tellfair

and pawn it. How to forge an excuse for going to the city, though, without weaving a web of lies from which even she shrank, was a problem. She finally decided on a bold stroke, and one day at dinner calmly informed Harvey that she wanted to go to Chicago to do a little shopping. Their financial condition by no means justified such an expedition, but the moment was skilfully chosen. Immersed in thought over one of his mechanical drawings, Harvey made no objection. He did not even ask her what she wanted to buy.

She was surprised to see Josephine Priestley at the station the morning she left for the city. Without any reason for the manœuvre except a desire to avoid Josephine's company, she managed to get into the car unseen by the other, half a dozen seats behind her.

Volley was perfectly familiar with the city, having spent a year there in the beginning of her career, before she went to Washington as a congressional protégée. She made her way directly towards the lower end of State Street, where she knew pawn-shops flourished. It chanced that for three or four blocks after leaving the station she found herself still behind Josephine, without having made any effort to keep there. The nervous, hesitant manner of the girl, and the way in which she scanned the signs on either side of the street, attracted Volley's attention; but it was not until Josephine had accosted a policeman that the elder woman's curiosity was aroused.

Without going out of her way, but merely changing her route a little, she followed Josephine down Adams Street to State, and south on State for a number of blocks. The young woman paused under the three gilded balls of a pawnbroker, glanced guiltily around, and then swiftly entered the shop. Volley, advancing quickly and posting herself cautiously at the very edge of the window, saw Josephine lay a little bag upon the

The Pride of Tellfair

counter, exchange a few words with a clerk, and then follow him back to a little apartment in the rear. Volley knew by experience that that little apartment was provided for the privacy of genteel patrons.

She waited no longer, but hurried on to another "loan-office," a block farther south, where the broker at once offered to advance three hundred dollars on the ring. Delighted at the amount, she accepted it at once. Emerging, she went north again, on the opposite side of the street, to avoid a possible meeting with Josephine, and made the few simple purchases she had ostensibly come to make. To these, however, she added, out of her own money, ribbons, gloves, laces, handkerchiefs, hat plumes, and underwear—all of them things which Harvey would never see, or, seeing, would never recognize, manlike, as new. Not so Bertha, however. She would have to be taken into the secret, and the best way to do it was to buy her something, too.

But with characteristic selfishness and duplicity she named two hundred dollars to Bertha, when she got home and confessed all, as the sum she had obtained for the ring. Bertha looked grave; and when the mother thrust a ten-dollar bill into her hand, in addition to the trinkets she had brought her, and told her to keep it for pin-money, Bertha accepted it without a word of thanks. But Volley did not want thanks or commendation from her daughter—only secrecy, and this she knew she would now get.

XXXVIII

JUST what to do with her knowledge of Miss Priestley's clandestine transaction Volley did not know; but she had a strong conviction that she ought to use it in some way. But this could wait. A nearer matter was the necessity of explaining to Hayford the disappearance of the ring from her finger, which she had been in the habit of wearing when with him.

"He wouldn't let me wear it, Bradley," said she, with fine indignation, "and he told me to give it back. He had no right to do it, and I will not give it back. I dare not wear it now, though, even with you, and I have laid it away. But *some* day, Bradley," she added, with a flash of her eyes, "I'll wear it—and openly."

Bradley did not pursue the subject. He was rather glad, on the whole, that she could no longer wear the ring. Its presence on her finger in public places had already created talk of a nature which he did not relish. Moreover, that "some day" of hers gave him an uncomfortable turn. Did she refer to the dissolution of that poor twisted body of her husband's, or merely to the dissolution of the tie which bound her to that body? Either interpretation repelled him. His superstitious nature shrank from the first; and from the second—well, he had often boasted that he was not a "marrying man," and he wondered if Volley could be so foolish as to think he wanted to marry her just because he had wanted to kiss her.

Three hundred dollars is a large sum for a woman to

The Pride of Tellfair

spend on such articles of apparel as her husband cannot detect. After buying everything that she could think of under this head, Volley still had about two hundred dollars left. Two hundred and three dollars and five cents was the exact amount, and she had a great desire to lop off the odd figures and make the sum even money. She disposed of the five cents by buying a glass of soda-water at Grant's (she never bought of Tom Feversham). As she sipped the drink, her roving eyes fell upon two neat books in a box, labelled *John of Barneveld*. At the same instant she had one of the greatest inspirations of her life.

"Charlie, you're a reader," said she, familiarly, to the clerk. "Are those good books?"

"For those that like them. I don't fancy they would interest you."

"Is it a novel?"

"No—biography."

"I didn't want it if it was a novel. My husband has bought lots of books through Mr. Grant, Charlie. Do you know whether he has these in his library?"

"I don't think so. He has the companion volumes, though—the *Dutch Republic* and *United Netherlands*."

"Then he would probably like these, wouldn't he?" she asked, enthusiastically. Her inspiration was turning out even better than she had expected.

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"How much are they worth?"

"Three dollars and a half."

She sipped her drink tentatively for a moment.

"Isn't that pretty high?" she asked, cajolingly.

"They were originally five dollars," answered the young man. "But we have had them on hand for some time."

She finished her drink, arose, coquetted a moment before the glass in the fountain, and then picked up her purse.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Three dollars is my limit to-day, Charlie. Show me something for three."

The clerk hesitated. "I don't believe we have anything in stock that Harvey would care for except these. He has looked our stock over a good many times. I'll make these three, Mrs. Congreve, but I want to tell you that we lose money on them at that figure."

"Very well," said she, with a triumphant gleam in her eye.

She carried the books home and laid them on the table before her husband. They were the first books she had bought him in years, and his amazement was natural enough. But when he glanced at the titles, and she said, in a wifely tone, "They'll complete your set, dear," his heart overflowed. Her face was near, and he kissed her fervently. But what astonished him most and kept him whistling softly the rest of the day was that she should have known that he had any of Motley's works at all, much less to think of completing the set. Verily, a woman saw much of which she said little.

Volley's money, tucked away in a glove-box, continued to worry her, however, evened up though it was, and by such a commendable process; not because it was in danger, but because it was idle and useless. Glancing over the city paper one day, she suddenly conceived a brilliant plan; and, hurrying into a street gown, she walked swiftly to Davenport's office.

"Morris, I want you to do me a favor," said she, after carefully closing the door between the two rooms. "Will you?"

"Let's hear it first."

"Well," said she, with the least nervousness, "I have a hundred dollars that I don't need just at present. I want you to take it and invest it for me in wheat and corn margins on the Board of Trade. I can't do it myself, because I should have to buy drafts, and every-

The Pride of Tellfair

body in the bank would wonder where I got the money from."

"That is just what I am wondering," said he, calmly.

"I don't suppose you would believe me if I told you it was a part of father's estate that has been tied up until now." This was merely a feeler.

"No, because I happen to know that your father's estate was settled up long ago."

"Nevertheless, it is," she insisted, but laughing guiltily, for she had no real hope of deceiving him.

"Don't be foolish," said he.

"If I tell you where I got it, Morris, will you promise to buy the margins for me?"

"No. I know where you got it without being told. You have pawned or sold that ring Bradley Hayford gave you."

"How do you know he gave me a ring?" she asked, brazenly.

"Several people know it," he observed, dryly. "I have heard it mentioned in half a dozen quarters, I suppose. How long did you think you could flash a stone of that size in the faces of Tidd's clerks without creating talk? Why did you accept such a present from that man?"

"Because I wanted the ring, I suppose," said she, stubbornly. "I had a right to accept it."

He did not attempt to argue the matter; he knew the futility of that too well.

"Does Harvey know about it?"

"No."

"Does Hayford know you have sold it?"

"No. He won't, either, unless you tell him."

"I sha'n't tell him or anybody else. I should advise you, though, to take your money and redeem the ring, give it back to Hayford, and make a clean breast of the matter to Harvey."

The Pride of Tellfair

"I can't do it. I have spent part of the money."

"Then don't gamble the rest of it away on wheat or corn. Buy clothes. You say you need them."

"I can't do that, either. Harvey would want to know where the money came from."

"What would you do with any money, then, that you might win by speculating?"

"If I won a good deal, he would forgive me."

"You have lived all these years with Harvey to small advantage if you think you could buy him off in that way," he answered, dryly. "Did you dispose of the ring in the city?" He knew she had been to Chicago.

"Yes."

"In a pawnshop?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you feel just a little bit ashamed when you entered such a place?"

Her eyes flashed maliciously.

"No more so, I fancy, than another woman whom I saw enter another shop about the same time," she answered, knowingly.

"What do you mean?"

But before she answered he knew, by some divination, where Josephine Priestley's interest money had come from, and where the rings on her fingers had gone. With the knowledge came a biting regret, a fierce shame, at his unworthy suspicions on the very day she had brought him the fruits of her sacrifice. But there was no time to indulge these emotions now, for the gray eyes of the woman before him were watching him curiously.

"Have you told any one else of this?" he asked, when he had drawn the story from her.

"No."

"Then don't, as you value my forbearance. Don't tell it to Bertha or Harvey or any one else, and, above

The Pride of Tellfair

all, not to Miss Priestley herself. I have forgiven a good many breaches of faith in you, Volley, but if you betray me in this I shall be merciless. This involves the pride and happiness of an innocent woman."

The faithless woman trembled at thought of fanning into flame that which smouldered in his eyes. But she kept up a show of indifference.

"You needn't be so fierce about it. I have no motive to tell any one about her. Besides," she added, with an unpleasant laugh, "she hasn't committed a crime, though one would think so from your talk."

"Crime!" he exclaimed. "I should say she hadn't. When that girl throttled her pride and took her keepsakes into that pawnshop and gave them up to save her credit she was doing one of the noblest acts of her life."

"But when I did the same," exclaimed Volley, in a gust of passion, "and laid down a ring that was as rightfully mine as those were hers, and did it because I needed clothes, I was doing a shameful thing, according to you. It all depends, Morris Davenport, on whose ox is being gored."

He made no reply, and she flung herself out of the room. He walked the floor for half an hour, but found no opening for his new knowledge, so far as his relations with Josephine were concerned.

"All that I can do," he concluded, bitterly, "is to curse that unlucky hour and wait for her forgiveness. The poor little girl! She pawned her rings, and I accused her of accepting a favor from another man that she would not accept from me. And I am the man she loves! By the eternal, I will make a rich, a noble, a complete reparation for that injustice of mine!"

XXXIX

A WEEK later Bertha calmly announced at the supper-table that she had resigned her position. Harvey looked up in astonishment, and Volley tightened her grip on the tea-pot handle.

"What are you going to do, then—starve?" she asked, roughly.

"I am not," answered Bertha, with dignity. "I am going to work for Mr. Collie. I am going to be his cashier, and I sha'n't have to work half as hard as I do now."

"And sha'n't get half as much pay, very likely," added Volley, caustically.

"How much will he pay you, daughter?" asked Harvey.

"Six dollars a week to begin with, and as soon as I learn to keep the books he will pay me as much as I am getting now, I think."

"You think," interposed the mother, sceptically. "Did he *say* so?"

"He said I should lose nothing by the change. You needn't have any fear of his not doing the right thing," she continued, confidently. "I know him pretty well, and I know that what he promises *me* he will do. But if he never paid me more than six dollars, I should go just the same. I simply can't stand the work in Morris's office any longer. I am so tired at night that I haven't enough life left to change my clothes."

"Then we are glad that you have resigned, my dear,"

The Pride of Tellfair

said Harvey. "We don't want you to work too hard. You are a good little girl to give up all your wages so uncomplainingly, and I don't know what we should have done without you."

"Thank you, papa," said she, soberly.

At the same time her pretty face faintly glowed with triumph. She had braced herself for a storm, and lo! her resignation had stirred only a zephyr. She did not know the source of that zephyr, or that her father was secretly glad to have her out of Davenport's office, even at a pecuniary loss.

Yet Harvey would sooner have had her installed almost anywhere else than in Collie's store. Mr. Collie, who had met Bertha in Davenport's office, had called at the house several times to see her, with his plush vest, soiled linen, untrimmed nails, and all. In addition, he usually brought an overpowering odor of poor cigars, and occasionally a whiff of something stronger on his breath. He explained quite candidly to Mr. Congreve, in his easy, off-hand way, that he occasionally took a drink with his customers from the country, simply as a matter of business; that he had never been under the influence of liquor in his life, and never expected to be. It was not good business. Besides, his stomach wouldn't stand it. As to his conscience, he did not say.

Harvey did not doubt Collie's word. In fact, the young man had a peculiarly winning sincerity. Yet Harvey disliked him. He disliked his endless talk about "trade." He disliked the bent knee and bowed head with which, in his fancy, the little man always breathed the sacred name of Business. For here was a man whose every thought and deed, every moment, every energy, was for business. "Yours for business" he had signed his posters, and sincerer subscription was never penned.

That there were such things in the world as literature

The Pride of Tellfair

and art, history and beauty, Collie seemed never to have discovered; and it was a constant wonder, a miracle, to Congreve that a man so set and solidified in the clay of materialism should be so just, scrupulous, and sincere. Where did he get it? When Collie once said, with a graceful flourish of his small, not over-clean hand: "Mr. Congreve, honesty is the best policy. If you want to build up a trade that will stand the test of time, give a man a dollar's worth of goods for a dollar's worth of money, and give it to him *every time*"—when Collie said this Congreve felt as if he were listening to a man who had scaled the very summit of the Mountain of Truth, and he murmured to himself, marvelling: "That man never read a chapter of philosophy in his life. Emerson, Montaigne, Carlyle would be gibberish to him. Where did he find that out?"

In spite of these qualities of Collie's, however, Harvey feared the influence of the man upon Bertha. She was as sensitive to impressions as wax. She had not been in Davenport's office a week before she was aping his mannerisms and quoting his philosophy of life. She would probably do the same with Collie. He would probably deepen that vein of materialism which Harvey had already discovered in her, and would strengthen her sense of cold, strict justice without tempering it with sweet charity. But what could he do? These objections would be unintelligible to Bertha. Besides, Collie's was the only position open, and they had to live.

"Hope you don't feel cut up, Davenport, over my taking your girl away," said Mr. Collie the following day, on the street, as he blew into Davenport's face a cloud of tobacco-smoke that almost gagged him, seasoned smoker though he was. "I made her a proposition and she accepted it. I told her she would have to give you a week's notice. If that ain't enough, I'll

The Pride of Tellfair

allow you three days more. I sha'n't pay her as much at first as you did. I can't afford it. She ain't worth it. But as soon as she can take care of the books, her salary goes to ten a week. Drop into my place some time, Davenport. No obligation to buy. But if you should want something, you will find a clerk on the other side of the counter by the time you have reached your side of it. No waits! Drive up to the curb-stone and look in, and a clerk will be out before you can holler. They've got instructions to watch the street. Buy a spool of thread and tender a twenty-dollar bill. You'll get your change in twenty seconds. Customers don't like to wait or apologize for big money. You'll find my store warm in winter and cool in summer. Women can't shop with cold feet or when they're sweatin'. They may not know what's the matter, but they'll prefer to trade somewhere else."

Mr. Collie was not voluble, strictly speaking—that is, he did not talk fast, or wedge his words in when others wanted to talk, but he could run along in a smooth, effortless way like this by the hour, as long as the theme was his store or business in general.

Had Davenport wanted to retain Bertha, he might have felt provoked over the manner in which Collie had got her. As it was, however, he felt like slapping the little wizard of dry-goods upon his narrow back and thanking him for his kindness. Instead, though, he took him into Feversham's and bought him a cigar, ostensibly to show that there was no hard feeling, but possibly to induce him to throw away the vile weed in his mouth. Mr. Collie, though, slipped the fresh cigar into an upper pocket of his plush vest with a tranquil "After dinner, Davenport," and continued to poison the air around him with the black, soggy stump of his own cigar.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Bertha's future boss," said Davenport to Feversham, after Collie had gone.

"So I heard last night. 'His for business,' eh?"

"His for business," repeated Davenport, laughing.

"I hope it's nothing more. The little lad had her out riding last Sunday."

"So I heard. I don't think there was any sentiment about it. I think he was probably just completing the present arrangement."

"Possibly. Yet it is well to remember, with all due respect, that Bertha is a fool. She proved that by falling in love with you. Now I have an idea, Morris, that Bertha spent the lovely hours of last Sunday afternoon in telling Mr Collie all about her love for you. And if I am not mistaken, she told him how your subsequent cruelty had killed that love. It would be essential for him to know that her love was dead," he added, dryly.

"I could believe a part of that, Tom, if it were anybody but Collie," answered Davenport. "Did you ever notice his nails?"

Feversham's words tempered his elation somewhat over Bertha's removal, and it was tempered still further by a talk with Harvey that afternoon. The father's anxiety weighed upon Morris, and made him feel, in a sense, still responsible for the girl's welfare.

"I have not urged Bertha to stay with you, Morris," said Congreve. "You can guess why, I fancy."

"Yes," answered Davenport, with that steady look which, between honest men, is better than bonds.

"And you have not urged her to stay?"

"No."

This was all that passed between them on that delicate feature of the subject.

The next day Davenport received a note from Josephine. "Her forgiveness!" he thought, with a smile.

The Pride of Tellfair

But his face darkened as he read. This also was about Bertha's resignation.

"DEAR MORRIS,—I have just heard of Bertha's leaving you. I take it for granted that she goes voluntarily, for I know that you would never discharge her or force her out. At first I was glad, but since thinking it over carefully I should feel better, I believe, if she did not go. I feel, somehow, as though our relations had forced her out, and that other people will feel the same way. Would it be too much for me to ask you to try to induce her to remain? I know that it is none of my business, and that I am taking a liberty in making such a request; but I am so sure that it would be for the best all around that I lay these considerations aside.

Faithfully,

"JOSEPHINE."

Davenport frowned over the epistle until the thought of Josephine's pawned jewels recurred to him; then the frown vanished. Nevertheless, the note which he rapidly penned to her contained only two sentences:

"It seems to me it would be as blameworthy to urge Bertha to stay, from a personal motive, as it would be to discharge her from the same kind of a motive. She wants to go, because she thinks best, and I cannot stop her."

The note brought a flush to Josephine's cheek. Its very brevity was rebuking. She felt that he, as usual, was right, and she accused herself of selfishness and cowardice. Indeed, she wondered if she had not been influenced in this whole affair as much by a fear of public condemnation as by a desire to do Bertha no wrong. If she had, she should hate herself for it.

XL

SHE had little time, though, that day for repining. Victoria had been complaining for several days of lassitude and pains throughout her body. About eleven o'clock she came in from the kitchen and lay down on the couch, and confessed her inability to get dinner. When Victoria gave up, something was wrong. In the morning, sure enough, she had fever, and Josephine promptly called Dr. Burney. After looking at the patient's tongue and feeling her pulse, he pronounced her trouble malaria.

Not quite satisfied with some of her symptoms, though, he said he would call again the next morning. By evening she was much worse, and spent a bad night. Josephine counted the hours until the first streak of gray light, and then sent Campeau for the doctor. The old man came at once, and after hemming and hawing for some time changed Victoria's malady from malaria to typhoid fever.

He and Josephine were in the down-stairs hall when he told her. Josephine turned faint and leaned against the wall for support.

"Now don't get alarmed, my dear Miss Priestley—don't get alarmed. It is only a light attack," said the old man, with professional mendacity. "Everything is in her favor—youth, health, prompt attention, and every facility for good care. If I were you, I shouldn't worry a bit. But typhoid is a stubborn thing, and she'll be in bed for two or three weeks." (He knew it

The Pride of Tellfair

would likely be five or six.) "She'll need a nurse, and I'll send one right around—Mrs. Brannigan. She's good at preparing delicacies, too, and handy about the house."

"But people that are only a little sick may die," said Josephine, fearfully.

"So may people that are perfectly well. But you don't keep worrying about it, do you?"

"She's the last one left me, doctor. If she should die—"

"Don't use that word again," said the old man, paternally. "She is not going to die—I pledge you my professional word—and you mustn't talk about it. You must keep a cheerful face whenever you go near her, and Mrs. Brannigan and I will do the rest."

Mrs. Brannigan arrived in less than an hour, with a bundle of clothes, and cheerily announced herself prepared to stay indefinitely. Josephine felt better at once. Courage and hope emanated from the buxom, full-breasted Irishwoman. The next fifteen minutes brought in three neighbors who had seen Mrs. Brannigan come, and had guessed the sinister purport of her visit. Old Mrs. Betts arrived five minutes later. Then, about eleven o'clock, Mrs. Bowman came, and Josephine had a little cry on her shoulder.

"Cry all you want to, my dear," said Alice. "It will do you good. Arthur says a woman's eyes are her safety-valve, and I don't know but he's right, although I never admit it to him. But I want to see, dear, what you are going to have for dinner. You don't know any more about cooking, I fancy, than a six-year-old child."

They went back to the kitchen, Alice sniffing critically. She turned over a steak which lay on a plate and pronounced it a fairly good cut. She peeped into the oven where some potatoes were baking, and, kneeling, tried them with a fork. She suddenly straightened up.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Josephine Priestley, you haven't attempted a *pie*!"
Josephine nodded, guiltily.

"What kind?"

"Cherry."

"Your first?"

"Yes."

"Well, you *are* brave, when one considers that it's for yourself. I have half a notion to stay for dinner, just to see how it comes out."

But she did not, in spite of Josephine's entreaties, pleading that Mr. Bowman hated to eat alone or with only David, though he sometimes did not speak ten words at a meal.

The afternoon passed more slowly. Three pupils were turned away, and Josephine told them that she did not know when they could resume their lessons. About half-past three a gentle knock, instead of the vain thumping of the muffled bell, announced another visitor—evidently some one who knew there was sickness in the house. Josephine opened the door and saw Morris Davenport. It was the first time he had called in six weeks, or since their agreement.

He stepped in without waiting for her confused invitation, hung up his hat, and walked into the parlor.

"You've heard?" she asked.

"Yes. Old Burney told me."

She looked at him a moment with lively and conflicting emotions.

"It was so good of you, Morris, to come in my trouble, but—" she began, and paused.

"But what?" he asked, smiling.

"But ought you to have done it? Isn't it a—a violation of our agreement?" Reproof was perhaps never more softly spoken.

"Yes. And so would my coming here to carry you out of a burning house have been. Did you suppose

The Pride of Tellfair

that I could leave you to weather a storm like this alone?"

"I am not quite alone," she smiled.

"I really have a good excuse for coming. I knew there was no one here to do anything, so I took it upon myself—now don't be startled—to telegraph to Chicago for a trained nurse. She will probably arrive on the 6.30. That doesn't mean that Victoria is in danger, or any sicker than you thought. It was my idea, not Burney's. It simply means that I thought a trained nurse could take better care of her than Mrs. Brannigan. There's everything in nursing, with typhoid. Mrs. Brannigan can go into the kitchen, and also serve as a relief for the nurse, and you can keep right on with your pupils. Most of them have pianos, doubtless, and you can give them lessons at their homes. Those that haven't pianos you can take to Mother Shipman's. She has not only said that you might, but has insisted upon it."

Josephine sank rather than sat upon a chair.

"Morris, you are *good!*" said she, fervently.

"No, no," said he, hastily. "Any one else would have done the same." Then, after an instant, he added, "No man can be called good for serving the woman he loves."

She fought back the joy that leaped to her eyes.

"So soon, Morris!" said she, as reproachfully as she could.

"Yes, so soon. I couldn't help it."

"But I told you that you mustn't love me any more," said she, faintly.

"Old King Canute told the tide it mustn't come in any more."

He sat down by her. The male in him was strong. Conquest was sweet, not only for its fruits but for itself. The blood was bounding through his veins, and

The Pride of Tellfair

he chafed to take what he believed of right his own—what he knew she would so willingly give except for conscience. But he did not touch her. It would have looked too much like claiming a reward. Besides, her face was grave, and he knew her thoughts had left him momentarily.

"It seems like a strange, even a selfish, thing to say at this moment, when my sister lies so sick," said she, anxiously, "but I don't know how I am ever to pay for all this. I—we are very poor. I think you are the only person on earth I could confess it to."

"Who on earth has as good a right to hear such a confession as I?"

As he glanced at her hand, so white against her black skirt, he noticed the circles her rings had left. The fingers were twitching, too, and the wave of tenderness which had been forming in his breast suddenly rose to his throat. It was a critical moment, but he controlled himself.

"You shall pay for it all yourself," said he. "But you shall have all the time you want. That is all I ask you to let me do—give me the privilege of seeing that you have the time."

"I think you are sure of that privilege," she murmured, mournfully. "I don't see how I could withhold it if I would."

"Would you, if you could?"

Their eyes met, and restraint was at an end.

"Oh, Morris!" she gasped, helplessly, and half leaned, half fell, upon him.

As she sank against his shoulder he slipped his arm around her. At the same time he kissed her—not once, but many times, quickly and passionately, like a man from whom the sweets of love have long been withheld. She let him have his way.

"Dear, this is a guilty love of ours," said she, at last.

The Pride of Tellfair

He made no answer.

"I am so weak," she continued, plaintively.

Still no answer.

"But I blame *you*, dear, this time. You looked at me so strangely—and you were so close—and you snatched my heart away before I knew it. You don't have any mercy, and you know I'm weak."

"Don't call yourself weak, Josephine," said he, in a low voice. "If you are weak, all womankind is weak." He bent his head and kissed her again, and for a moment the moist red lips were still.

"I don't believe you can feel as I do about this," she began again. "I don't believe any man could. If I said that I would marry you, you wouldn't hesitate an instant. You wouldn't have a single scruple."

He smiled, but said nothing.

"Would you?" she asked.

"Would I what? Have a scruple?"

"No. Would you marry me?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"You would be willing to leave the responsibility all to me?"

"Yes."

"And your conscience, too?"

"I don't think I could leave it in better hands."

"That's the way you men saddle us women with our-
dens. You are willing to go as far as we will, because you believe that we won't go too far. That's the reason a bad woman does so much harm."

Another silence followed, but he could see that her brain was busy.

"Maybe you think that I *am* willing to marry you," said she, as if struck by a new thought, looking up into his eyes solicitously. "Maybe you think that that is what *this* means."

"No, I don't think that," said he, quietly.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Because it means just the opposite."

"How is that?"

"It means that what I cannot have lawfully, according to my heart, I am taking unlawfully—and my dear sister sick up-stairs."

He saw that she was unstrung.

"Don't talk that way, my dear," said he, soothingly. "It isn't true."

"It is true," said she, intensely. "That is just the shameless point I have reached with you. If any one had ever told me, Morris Davenport, that some day I should let a man to whom I was not even engaged kiss me, not once, but many times, I should have told that person that he lied. And now I've done it." She covered her burning face with her hands. "Ah, Morris, you have pulled me down!"

Morris looked at her with eyes of pain. Nothing she could have said, perhaps, would have hurt him more.

"I deny, Josephine, that you have done anything wrong," said he, emphatically.

"I have done what *I* think is wrong, and what you knew I thought was wrong."

She withdrew herself, and he arose and began to walk the floor with his hands in his pockets, as he had a habit of doing in his office.

"This is where it always ends," said he, sorrowfully. "I came up here to-day full of the joy of a good deed, bringing you news that I knew would ease your anxiety. I freely violated my promise about coming because I had put myself clear out of sight in the background. Nothing was further from my mind than what has just occurred. Indeed, I was intent on showing you that I could come and behave myself. I wanted to show you that I was not a boy who had to be bound by rules and regulations. Yet here we are again, with regret and chagrin gnawing us, like rats around a cheese."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Do you know why it is?" she asked, sadly.

"I'm sure I don't."

"Because sin always ends in shame and regret."

"I can't stand that word 'sin,' Josephine—not when it includes you," said he, vigorously. "Please don't use it again."

She smiled maternally at his broad back as he paced down the room again.

"Let us call it remissness, then, or error," she suggested.

"That's better."

"It is hard on you, Morris, when you came up here feeling so good and unselfish, to have it all end this way. I am so grateful to you, too. I didn't want to make you unhappy," said she, sweetly.

"Oh, I am not blaming you."

"But I feel so terribly sorry over what has happened. You can't respect me if this goes on. I know you think you can, but you can't, because after a while I sha'n't respect myself. Oh, the solemn vows we have broken! Now I am going to lay aside all rules and regulations as you call them, and not treat you as a boy, but as a man. I am going to ask you to help me to live up to what *I* think is right. From now on you share half of the responsibility. I am going to put you on your honor, and, as I trust you fully, I shall let you do just as you please. Will you do that?"

He did not answer at once. The free horse of the plains was slow to put his head into a bridle.

"Will you?" she repeated, smiling.

"It's hard to go on your honor to live up to a standard that you think is unnecessarily high."

"But won't you do it for my sake—just because *I* want you to—just because it will make me happier?"

"Yes, I will do it," said he, slowly. He paused at her chair with a rueful smile. "Now they *are* all in the past,

The Pride of Tellfair

beyond recovery — all those little, innocent tokens of love.”

“All save one,” said she, happily. “That one is a little card of merit, such as you used to get at Sunday-school, a long, long time ago, when you were a good little boy. Here it is.”

And resting her palms on his temples, she drew his head lower and kissed him on the lips.

XLI

A SPRUCE young man in a silk hat and a Prince Albert coat, with a medicine-case in his hand, briskly mounted Davenport's stairs, nodded to the new stenographer—a pretty red-head, with a Hibernian cast of features—and passed into the private office.

"Morris, old Billy Manderson is sick—probably dying—and wants to make his will. He wants you to come out and bring Squire Walrod with you."

"Why didn't he send for Dexter. Dexter is his lawyer."

The young physician shrugged his shoulders, and stepped over to examine a picture on the wall.

"Why didn't he send for old Burney instead of me? Burney is his doctor."

"I don't see how I can go to-day, Hartley," said Davenport. "There's no danger of the old man snuffing out before to-morrow, is there?"

"He may be snuffed out now, for all I know. Still, I think he's likely to hold on for several days, and he may live a week or a month. When a man holds on as long as Uncle Billy has, he dies hard. Living has become a habit, you see, and habits are hard to break," he added, facetiously. "But I'm personally anxious, Davenport, that he should get that will made in cast-iron form."

"Expect a legacy?"

"No, but there's a raft of relatives out there who do, and of all the mean, stingy, shameless, heartless people that I ever saw, I give them the palm. They've gath-

The Pride of Tellfair

ered out there like a flock of buzzards around a dying horse—some of them from as far as Kansas. Eat! Penelope's lovers couldn't hold a candle to the puniest of them. They've walked that farm over a dozen times, and inspected every foot of it. They've looked at every horse and cow on the place, and, I have no doubt, have agreed among themselves on a division of the plunder. They've even counted the chickens. Now I happen to know that the old man is going to cut them off a pretty thin slice of his fat meat, and I want you to be sure and see that they don't grab any more after his death."

"I'll see to that," said Davenport, cheerfully. "I know some of those relatives myself. I'll be out the first thing to-morrow morning. There's really no need to take Walrod, but if the old man wants him, I guess I'd better."

Just before noon, Davenport climbed the dirty, narrow stairs to Norman Walrod's office. The old police-justice had a trial of some kind on, and his little, stuffy office was packed with spectators, steaming around a big, red-hot wood-stove in the centre of the room. It was not an inviting atmosphere; but Davenport was hardened, and, drawing a cigar for a disinfectant, he entered, leaving the door open behind him.

"Shut that door, Davenport!" bawled the judge, instantly, in a voice of thunder.

"A little fresh air wouldn't hurt this place, your honor," observed Davenport. "It smells like a dog-kennel."

"How kin it help it?" growled Walrod, glowering significantly on the assemblage of free-born Americans. They, with national good-humor, laughed at the joke on themselves. "Officer," continued the judge, grimly, addressing a slouchy individual with a star on his breast, "station yourself at that door and arrest the next man that leaves it open. I'm gettin' tired of this. If I've ordered that door shut once this morning, I've done it

The Pride of Tellfair

twenty times. Dog-kennel or no dog-kennel, I ain't going to heat all out-doors with wood at five dollars a cord, sawin' and splittin' extry."

He glanced crustily at Davenport as the latter coolly took the chair just vacated by the officer—the only empty one in sight—and lit his cigar. The justice seemed on the point of ordering him not to smoke in court, but on second thought he refrained and lit his own corn-cob pipe instead, with short, fierce puffs.

"Now go on with this here ham case," he commanded, drawing a huge silver watch that weighted his vest down like a flat-iron (he was in his shirt-sleeves). "I've heard ham this morning till I can taste it. It's mighty nigh dinner-time, and I want to wind this picayunish case up. Did you want to see me, Davenport?" he turned and asked, in a milder tone.

"I did."

"Kin you wait till this case is tried? We'll be through in ten minutes," he added, with a threatening glance at the counsel for the defence, a nervous young fellow whose sheepskin had probably not yet begun to wrinkle.

"Go ahead," said Davenport.

The case, which was a criminal one, involving the stealing of certain hams out of Lyman Hornblow's smoke-house, moved on apace. When the evidence was all in, the judge, discouraging the argument which the defence wanted to make, instructed the jury:

"Gentlemen, the case is up to you. You've heard the evidence and you know as much about it as I do. That's mighty little, for of all the irrelevant, immaterial, and nonsensical testimony that I ever heard drug into a case in my thirty years of experience, I've heard this morning. If you find that Nig Washington here"—indicating the prisoner, a young jet-black negro—"broke into Hornblow's smoke-house and took them hams, he's guilty. If you find that he didn't, he ain't,

The Pride of Tellfair

and that ends it. It's my private opinion that he ain't guilty; for if he was, and the hams he took was as poor as the one Lime Hornblow sold me last week for fifteen cents a pound, straight through, bone and all, and Nig *et* them hams himself, he'd be standin' before a higher court than this to-day. Officer, take the jury into my back room there and see that they are properly guarded until they arrive at a verdict. Also see that they don't tamper with my smokin' tobacco. The State don't set aside an allowance for jury tobacco. I guess the prisoner will set here and wait for you without any guardin'. He knows better than to run away. And if the jury finds you not guilty, Nig, I want you to come around this afternoon and finish sawin' that wood I give you a coat for. Hear? If you don't, I'll commit you for contempt," he added, with a wink at Davenport. "Gentlemen, court's over. Clear out! Officer, I'm goin' to dinner now and try to eat something, if I don't find myself too full of ham. If the jury agrees, you can receive their verdict and report to me. Leave that stove door open when you go, so that the wood won't all burn out. Come on, Morris."

The old man, in spite of his crustiness, loved Davenport; and as they descended the stairs together he slipped his arm through the younger man's and confided to him that young Sperry, counsel for the defence, wasn't doing so badly for a beginner. On the way to the Basley House, where Walrod also took his meals, Davenport communicated old Billy Manderson's message.

"I can go with you all right in the morning," said the judge. "I've got a little jerkwater case set for ten o'clock, but I'll stave that off. How much will there be in it for me, do you suppose?"

"Three or four dollars, probably."

"Easy money. Still, it's lettin' old Billy out of his mortal coil cheap. Take one of your horses, I suppose."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Yes." Morris smiled, for he knew that old Norman wanted to avoid livery hire.

"Pick out a gentle one. I'm too heavy to be snapped around on the tail of one of them four-legged comets of yourn."

Davenport called in the evening to inquire after Victoria. It was the fourth week of her sickness; the disease had run its course, and the sick one was gaining as rapidly as could be expected. To-night, Josephine, dismissing the nurse for a few minutes' relaxation, took Davenport up-stairs for the first time.

Victoria was very thin and white. She was so weak that she could scarcely lift her arm, and had the piping voice of a child. When she laughed, as she was beginning to do now, the thin, shrill sound made Josephine shudder.

"Just as soon as you can go out, Victoria," said Morris, "I'm going to put the roses into your cheeks again, by taking you out riding every day."

Victoria's eyes, larger and bluer than ever, sparkled with pleasure.

"How beautiful the trees and fields will look!" she murmured.

"Yes," said he, without explaining that it was December, and the trees bare and the fields dull and brown. "The sunshine and air will do you more good than all the medicine in the world."

"I'm so sick of medicine," said she, wearily. "How long will it be?"

"Not very long now."

"A week?"

"Yes; maybe a little longer. But you will be sitting up soon, and the people will be coming in to see you, and it won't seem so long."

"I should like to see some of my pupils," said she.

The Pride of Tellfair

"They will come, dear," said Josephine. "Some of them have been here to ask about you almost every day, but you were too sick to see them."

"I suppose they wanted me to give them a lesson."

Her mind occasionally wandered a little yet, through mere languor; but they could see the old fun lurking in her eyes now, and knew that she was joking. In a moment of tenderness, Josephine dropped by the side of the bed and kissed the frail joker very gently.

"I want to whisper something to Morris," added Victoria.

"Very well. It's decidedly impolite, but I'll excuse you this time, seeing that you are sick."

Morris knelt in Josephine's place, and lay his ear close to the invalid's lips.

"I want you to take Josie out riding, too," she whispered.

"Will you see that she goes if I ask her?" he whispered back.

She nodded, gayly. Then Miss Hunter, the nurse, tapped on the door and told them, smilingly, that they must go down-stairs and let her patient sleep.

"Do you want to know what she told me?" asked Davenport, down-stairs.

"You'd better not betray any confidences," she answered, cautiously. "Younger sisters are sometimes quite embarrassing."

"She told me that I must take you out riding, too."

"That was like her," said Josephine, affectionately. Then, in an altered tone, she added, "But she's a sick girl yet, and not wholly responsible for what she says."

"It struck me that she was perfectly rational."

"If you say so, I'll go. Under the new arrangement I submit to whatever you dictate, remember."

"Under the new arrangement I see that I shall become a very heavily laden scapegoat."

The Pride of Tellfair

Josephine laughed.

"No," she protested. "I shall always give you the benefit of my superior wisdom, but shall leave the decision to you."

"What does your superior wisdom say to this?"

"It says I oughtn't to go."

"Then go you don't."

But, in spite of his gayety, a shade of disappointment crept over his face. She saw it, and was just wondering whether she dare add an alleviating word when the door-bell, no longer muffled, suddenly rang. It was almost ten o'clock, and she threw an inquiring glance at Davenport.

"Who can that be, at this hour?" she asked, rising.

"Possibly some one for me."

She opened the door, and Davenport, hearing his name, stepped into the hall. A farmer's boy, rather flushed and excited, stood on the threshold.

"Mr. Manderson is dying, Mr. Davenport, and Miss Helzer wants you to come right out with Squire Walrod to make the will."

Davenport hesitated an instant. An eighteen-mile drive, after ten o'clock, on a pitch-dark night, was not a thing to be accepted with enthusiasm.

"Is Dr. Hartley there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, I'll come."

"Miss Helzer said I was to bring you out in my buggy. I've got a fast pacer," he added, with a touch of pride.

"I've got a faster one," answered the lawyer. "We'll use mine, and then you won't have to bring us back. You drive on and tell Miss Helzer that I shall be right out. You'll have to move, too, or I'll beat you there."

The boy disappeared, and Davenport stepped to the hall-tree for his coat and hat. Victoria's sickness had put a keener edge on Josephine's sympathy where death

The Pride of Tellfair

was concerned, and her face was now soft and subdued.

"Poor old Uncle Billy!" she murmured.

"He won't live to spit that tobacco-juice on Myron Rakestraw's grave," said Davenport, smiling at the recollection.

"Oh, Morris!" said she, reproachfully, yet smiling herself. "That sounds heartless. But I believe Uncle Billy would laugh too, if he could hear it."

"Of course he would. Good-bye. Don't you feel sorry for me?"

"Indeed I do—it is so dark to-night!" she murmured. "I shall offer up a little prayer that you don't drive off a bridge or into a ditch. Promise me you won't drive too fast," she added, tightening her hand on his.

"I won't drive *too* fast. Good-night!"

XLII

JUDGE WALROD, wifeless and childless, slept in the little room off his office to which he had consigned the jury in the ham case. Davenport expected to find him in bed, but the old man was still sitting in his shirt-sleeves and stocking feet, smoking, with a little, ancient wood-stove between his outstretched legs. In one corner stood a single bed, still in the tumbled condition in which he had left it when he arose that morning. In another corner was an old couch showing half its springs through the faded upholstering. The walls were hung with a few unframed prints, mostly colored supplements to the Chicago Sunday papers, and maps, township plats, and files of ancient newspapers as yellow and rotten as the wrappings of a mummy. No woman's hand had ever touched the room, just as none had ever touched its occupant, and both had suffered in consequence.

"Old Billy is dying, Norman, and we've got to go out to-night," announced Morris, briefly. "My horse will be here in three minutes."

Norman swore roundly and flatly refused to go, but even as he did so he drew his square-toed, cowhide brogans towards him, gruntingly pulled them on, and began to lace their leather strings.

"I might have known that if old Billy could pick out an inconvenient hour to die in, he'd do it. He's the stubbornest man I ever knew, when he sets hisself." He began the lacing of the other shoe, which made him

The Pride of Tellfair

red in the face, and cut off his wind momentarily. "But I suppose I oughtn't to talk that way about the poor old devil, now. A man at the gates of eternity is entitled to some respect. Where's my pipe and tobacco?"

"I've got some cigars," said Davenport, handing him one.

"This horse gentle?" asked the old man, as he gingerly pulled himself into the buggy, making it reel under his bulk.

"As gentle as a dove."

"And about as swift, I reckon," added Walrod, with a chuckle. "Don't you upset me, boy. The country can't afford to lose me and old Billy Manderson both the same night."

It was a black, starless night. The hard, white road seemed to end, a rod ahead, in a yawning pit. The spirited horse, Davenport's best, received the word for which it had been restlessly waiting. As if divining the importance of the journey, it leaped forward, stretched its graceful body, and thrust its long head and neck out into the night, like a wild goose settling to its flight. Then reaching out with long, rapid strides, it drew them swiftly and smoothly along, like the superb, God-made machine which it was. "Trot! trot! trot!" Those words had rung in its ancestors' ears for centuries, and in its own from birth. To trot, and trot well, was the chief end of its existence. Yea, trotting was better, sweeter, grander than existence itself; and as a man will lay down his life for country, or a woman for honor, so would this thoroughbred lay down its life for speed.

Shadowy objects on either side—houses, barns, straw-stacks—leaped into sight, like phantoms of the night, and then leaped out again. Bridges roared, without warning, beneath their flying wheels. Neither man spoke much. Davenport, soothed by the smooth motion, watched the ceaseless, tireless play of the dim

The Pride of Tellfair

form before him. Walrod, with his hat jammed down to his ears, and his cigar clinched between his teeth and burning like tinder in the stiff breeze, gripped the back of the seat with one hand and the top-bow with the other. His short, thick legs were rigidly braced against the foot-rest.

"Say, Morris," he gasped, finally, "ain't you givin' this streak of greased chain-lightnin' a pretty free rein?"

"It takes a free rein to win in a race with Death," answered the other.

"It's as dark as a pocket. If we should strike another team we'd never know what killed us."

"Neither would the other fellow—if that's any comfort."

Walrod subsided for a time.

"You'll have your plug winded before we git half-way there, at this rate," he began again.

"This horse would keep up this gait, Norman, without another sound from me, until it dropped dead."

"How much did you pay for him?"

"Six hundred dollars."

"No horse is worth that."

"A horse is worth just what he will bring."

They flashed by a large building close to the road. The smell of pine and the gleam of unpainted boards told them that it was new.

"I didn't know Turner was buildin' a new barn," observed the judge.

"He isn't. This is Bob Hawkins's place."

"Bob Hawkins's! Good God Almighty, Morris, are you crazy? Bob Hawkins's is three miles from Tellfair."

"So are we."

The judge sat in stunned silence for a moment, peering vainly into the impenetrable gloom.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Why, boy," he blustered, "we 'ain't been on the road ten minutes yet!"

"Just about ten minutes," answered Davenport, holding his watch-dial against the glow of his cigar. "We are going a mile every three minutes and a half, if not more."

Norman groaned, muttered something emphatic about some kind of hare-brained idiocy, and settled into a resigned silence. It was fifteen or twenty minutes later when Firefly, without any warning, pulled out an extra inch or two of line from Davenport's hands and shot ahead like an arrow from a bow.

"What in hell is the matter now?" cried the judge, thoroughly alarmed. "Hold the cuss in or he'll kill us both."

"Don't talk!" said Davenport, sharply. "I don't know what's the matter. I think he hears wheels ahead. It's probably the boy that came after me. Let us hope so, and that he'll have sense enough to get out of the road," he added, grimly.

He was straining his eyes into the pitchy night ahead, and working hard with both voice and rein to reduce their speed; but it was no easy task to control the excited and determined animal.

"Hadn't I better yell for him to clear the track?" asked the judge, excitedly.

"If you do, we'll have a runaway. And we shall, anyhow, if you don't shut up."

At that instant something black suddenly shot up on the squire's side, apparently right on top of him. He dodged, clutched Davenport's arm, looked again, and the thing was gone.

"The boy," observed Davenport, calmly.

The judge heaved a sigh of relief. The horse was slowing down.

"If there's any more teams to be passed, Morris, I'll

The Pride of Tellfair

walk around 'em, and Billy Manderson kin go right on to heaven and pick out his harp without a will. If I owned this hoss of yours I'd shoot him on sight for such a trick as that."

Davenport laughed joyously.

"He's been taught all his life, Norman, and all his father's, grandfather's and great-grandfather's lives, that the first, last, and only thing to do, when he sees another horse, is to *pass* him."

Morris had not lost his bearings, and they turned into the Manderson place a few minutes later. The sagacious horse slowed up of its own accord. Davenport glanced at his watch again.

"Nine miles in thirty-five minutes!" said he, with a note of pride, to the astounded Walrod.

He carefully blanketed his steaming horse, after which he patted its wet neck approvingly and gave it a cube of sugar from the supply he always carried in his pocket. Walrod looked on with a cynical eye.

"I suppose that's to egg him on in his hellishness," he observed, sarcastically.

The big, square house was dark save for a dull glow through the marginal lights of the front door. Miss Helzer, old Billy's housekeeper, was waiting for the men of law, and led them to the death-chamber at once. To their astonishment the dying man was sitting up in bed. The relatives, a round dozen of them, sat or stood about the room, suspicious and watchful. Young Dr. Hartley sat in a corner by himself, as if refusing intercourse with the "buzzards." His chair was tilted against the wall, and, to the amazement of the newcomers, he had a cigar in his mouth.

"Is that the latest practice, Hartley, for delaying dissolution?" asked Davenport, aside, with a questioning glance at the doctor's cigar.

"The old man has smoked three pipes since eight

The Pride of Tellfair

o'clock, and I thought I'd keep him company," answered Hartley, coolly.

"Do you mean to say, seriously, that Billy has been smoking?"

"Go feel his pipe; you'll find it hot yet."

There the pipe was, sure enough, beside Billy's medicines and Bible, on a little stand by the bed.

"Why did you let them send for us, then, at this hour, with the report that he was dying?" asked Davenport.

"He was—he is. He may die at any minute. He has had several sinking-spells, and I thought once he was gone. I think all that brought him back was the determination to balk these harpies."

Davenport glanced towards the corner again. Miss Helzer had sat down on the edge of the bed and allowed the sick man to take one of her hands. Aside from bleaching his florid face, the summons of Death had effected little change in old Billy. His arms, shoulders, and chest were as plump as ever. The skin of his cheeks hung in flabby folds, but the masterful jaw did not sag. His sunken, faded, and wellnigh sightless eyes were like magic peep-holes into a gray, hoary past. Yet they still burned with that unquenchable fire which had kept his life-machine steamed up for close onto a century.

Here was a man born before George Washington died, who remembered well the War of 1812, who was a grandfather of sixty-three when the Civil War began, too old by nearly twenty years, under military law, to carry a musket. And still he was here. His generation had long been laid away in the church-yard, and mostly forgotten. His children, even, were all long since dead; and the six grandchildren, who had gathered with the others around his death-bed to cast lots for his goods and raiment, were bent and worn with age. Yet there

The Pride of Tellfair

he was, a gray old spider in his web—a morsel so dry, so tough, so cured by the winds of time as to turn the tooth of Death himself and make him long at his task.

The old man sat propped up in bed, blinking like an owl in sunlight and mumbling to himself. But at every sound he would lift his head and hearken, like some fierce old eagle wounded unto death, but ready to fight to the last beat of its heart. Occasionally his ancient face softened, and, crooning childishly, he would pat the hand he held and kiss it with his sunken lips. Some of the female relatives chastely averted their faces at these manifestations of an unhallowed love, as they chose to regard it; but Miss Helzer's black eyes did not for an instant acknowledge any shame, and defied them all.

"Here's Mr. Davenport, Uncle Billy," said she, as Morris came forward. "He has come to make your will."

The old man looked up, struggling with his failing eyes and mind.

"Is that you, Morris? Is it him, Carrie? Yes, yes, it's him. I see him. I was afraid they would send for Dexter, that scoundrelly Dexter! But you wouldn't do that, would you, Carrie?"

He paused and blinked again, and it seemed as if his mind were momentarily at fault. But there was still activity in the workshop in his skull, and the next instant a cunning look overspread his face.

"Bend down, Morris," he whispered, huskily, placing his trembling hands on the young man's shoulders. "They've come to rob me—the ingrates. They've left me alone all these years, whether I was sick or well, and now they have come to pick my bones. Give them a thousand dollars apiece and not a cent more. All the rest goes to this little girl."

The little girl was Miss Helzer, of course, a buxom

The Pride of Tellfair

woman of forty. But doubtless she did seem young to him, who was fifty-eight when she first saw the light.

"Make it tight, Morris—make it tight," continued the old man, earnestly. "They'll try to break it. They'll claim I'm in my dotage. But the little girl will show you a will drawn eight years ago by Dexter. Then I only gave them five hundred apiece. Ha, ha! And now I'm giving them a thousand. I'm getting generous in my old age. Ha, ha! But they don't deserve it. They left me alone. They never wrote to me. They didn't know whether I was sick or well. This little girl did it all. She was my ministering angel, and when I reach those heavenly courts I'll intercede for her. But make it tight, Morris—make it tight!"

During this whispered monologue the excitement among the relatives was great. One of the men, unable to stand the suspense longer, stole nearer and bent forward to listen. Davenport raised his head.

"This conversation is strictly confidential, my friend, and if we are again interrupted I shall request that you all leave the room," said he, bluntly.

"That's right! Send 'em out—send 'em out!" cackled Billy, warming, with the very dew of death on his brow, at the prospect of battle. "We don't want them. But can you make 'em go, Morris?" he asked, in a doubtful undertone. "*I couldn't—the little girl and I couldn't.*"

"No, he can't do it," said one of the women, shrilly. "We're your blood relations, Billy Manderson, and the law will allow us to stay. What's more, it will give us our due share."

"Hear that!" exclaimed the sick man, clutching the lawyer's hand. "Hear that! They're after me. They'll git me yet."

"No, they won't get you, Uncle Billy, I pledge you my word," said Davenport. Turning to the group, he added: "You might as well know now, all of you, that

The Pride of Tellfair

the law gives you absolutely nothing except what this old man, in his generosity, sees fit to will you. He wants you to have a thousand dollars apiece; and I must say that, considering your shameful neglect of him during all these years, I regard the bequest as a notable example of generosity. The rest of his fortune, some fifty thousand dollars or *more*," he added, giving the word a tantalizing emphasis, "goes to Miss Helzer here, who has faithfully taken care of him for the last ten years."

"That's right! Give it to 'em straight, Morris!" cried the old man, exultantly—from the threshold of eternity.

A groan went up from the outraged relatives. One of the men, leaping to his feet, called out, vehemently: "That's a lie! You'll get half of it yourself. You've conspired with that shameless hussy to pull the wool over that old dotard's eyes and cheat us blood relatives out of our own."

"Put him out! Knock him down! He called you a liar!" shouted old Billy, his fighting blood now fairly up, and he actually made a move to leave the bed.

"Keep cool, Billy," said Davenport. "We'll give this cowardly cur a chance to answer in court to Miss Helzer for defamation of character. I shall be pleased to conduct the suit for her free of charge."

The threat had the desired effect, and the man said no more. The will was swiftly drawn, signed, and attested, in the presence of Norman Walrod, notary public, and two witnesses—Miss Helzer and the doctor—and made as "tight" as legal lore could make it.

The centenarian, still sitting up, was quiet for some time after. It was hard to say whether he was thinking or dozing or in that state of quiescence which precedes dissolution. At length, though, he roused himself.

"Play for me, Carrie," he commanded.

The Pride of Tellfair

"What shall I play?" asked Miss Helzer, rising and seating herself at a little cabinet organ.

"You know," said he, with a smile.

"'On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand'?"

"No, no. Not that."

"'Oh, How I Long to be There'?"

"No, no," he repeated, impatiently. "The other one. You know." Evidently it was too much of a mental effort for him to name the hymn or song.

"I am sure I don't," she answered, gently. "Can't you name any of the words?"

"'There was an old man,'" he began, slowly, and stopped.

She flushed, and glanced about her in embarrassment.

"Oh, not *that*—not *now*."

"Yes, yes, I want to sing it," he whined.

"Let him sing what he wants to, Miss Helzer," interposed the doctor.

After another instant of hesitation she touched the keys, and the strains of a rollicking old air came bubbling out of the little organ. Old Billy's face lighted; he cleared his throat as naturally as ever, and in a quavering, broken voice began to sing:

"There was an old man who had a wooden leg;
No tobaccy could he borrow, nor tobaccy could he beg.
There was another old man as sly as a fox,
And he always had tobaccy in his tobaccy-box."

Miss Helzer played an interlude; Billy smiled as sweetly as a child. Then came the second stanza:

"Said the first old man, 'Will ye give me a chew?'
Said the second old man, 'I'll be dummed if I do.
Keep away from them gin-mills and save up your rocks,
And you'll always have tobaccy in your tobaccy-box.'"

The Pride of Tellfair

The music ceased. Old Billy's eyes were lifted to the ceiling. But they were looking into infinity, now, fixed and unblinking, filled with an unearthly light.

"That's what I done," he whispered, solemnly. "I saved up my rocks."

He sank gently back upon the pillows and died. Such was his exit, after nearly one hundred years upon the stage of life. Such the words which went echoing after him into eternity.

XLIII

DAVENPORT went up to Walrod's office, when they got back to Tellfair, to put the will in the latter's safe for the night. He tarried a moment while Walrod pulled off his shoes, lit his pipe, and with a grunt of satisfaction thrust his white-socked feet towards the stove. But the fates were against him. At that same instant there came a loud, insistent rap upon the outer door.

"Well, now, who in tarnation is *that?*" he snapped. "If people can't do business with me by daylight, I wish they wouldn't do it at all. I'll keep out of the poor-house. Another will, I suppose, nine miles the other side of town."

He reached for his shoes once more; then muttering that he would be somethinged or other if he put on those somethinged or other shoes again that night for any something or other on the face of God's foot-stool, he shuffled into the outer office in his stocking feet.

"Shut the door," said Davenport, with professional caution; and the squire banged it to with a force that made the ink-well jump.

Davenport finished a notation on the back of the legal instrument, tucked it away in the little antiquated safe, and closed the door—a precaution the squire himself seldom took, as he kept nothing in the safe more valuable than his smoking-tobacco, which was not of a quality to tempt men to burglary. Then Walrod

The Pride of Tellfair

shuffled in again, with a very expressive face, and closed the door behind him.

"Here's a pretty kittle of fish for me to bile," he began, grumblingly. "Who do you suppose is out there?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Well, if you'd guess the last people on earth that ought to be there at this hour, you'd hit it. It's that young popskull Collie and Berthy Congreve, and they want to git married."

"Married!" echoed Davenport.

"That's what they say," answered Walrod. "And judging from the fact that they have a license, duly signed by Pont Jones, I take it they ain't jokin'. What am I going to do about it? Of course, it's clandestine or they wouldn't be here at this hour. I don't care about tying up Harvey Congreve's girl unless he wants her tied up, and then be damned forty ways for Sunday by this community. At the same time they are free, white, and twenty-one, and as a magistrate it's my business to lay personality aside and do simple justice. Now what *is* simple justice?"

In answering this question, Davenport was scarcely conscious of the bearing it had upon himself. It hardly occurred to him that Bertha's marriage to Collie would remove the barrier which stood between him and Josephine. Yet in some curious way he was wondering what answer Josephine would have given Walrod. She would have told him not to marry them, he was quite sure. But then *she* would have looked at the question from a personal stand-point.

"If they want to get married, we can't stop them," he said. "We could only delay them a few hours or days at the most. I don't know that there would be any wisdom in that, or that we have any right to do it. On the other hand, it will hurt Harvey, I know. I'd sooner be mixed up in a free fight than this affair."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Maybe I wouldn't," answered Walrod, gloomily. "Looked at one way, it's all right; another way, it's all wrong. Ain't it a big surprise to you, Morris?"

"The biggest in some time."

"It's a bouncer to *me*, I can tell you. I never liked that little, putty-faced skunk out there myself. If I had a daughter I'd sooner tie her to a clothes-dummy. A dollar's worth of goods for a dollar's worth of money! Hell! I wonder if that is what he thinks he's giving *her*."

"She probably thinks so."

"Well, she's the doctor. They say he's sharp. But so's a jack-knife. What 'll I do?"

"Let's go out and talk to them a little."

The undersized aspirants to matrimony were seated on opposite sides of the room, as if resolved to decorously keep their distance until the law made them one. Bertha wore a fawn-colored coat which swept the floor. (Collie had been trying to introduce the style in Tellfair.) Her neck was encircled by a black marten fur, and three black plumes rose majestically from a broad-brimmed, black velvet hat, of a pattern handled exclusively in Tellfair by Mr. Collie in his millinery department. She might have been an enlarged image of the Queen of Fairies, and not so greatly enlarged, either. She was very dignified, however, very composed, and very pale. Her threadlike, scarlet lips were as straight as a rule. Her eyes, usually sky blue, were purple with suppressed excitement, but fearless.

Collie was also composed, and also a little pale. He was buried from his ears down in a checked ulster, although the weather was not severe. The garment seemed several sizes too large, and it was only by occasionally hitching himself up that he kept from sinking out of sight altogether.

"Evening, Davenport," said he, suavely, with a slight

The Pride of Tellfair

motion of the stiff hat he held in his hand. Davenport's presence there at half-past twelve o'clock at night seemed to cause him no surprise.

"Good-evening, Morris," said Bertha, distinctly. Perhaps she turned a little paler.

Davenport sat down with his arm over the back of a chair, familiarly.

"Does Harvey know of this, Bertha?" he asked, frankly.

"No, sir."

"Have you any reason to suppose that he would object to it?"

"I have."

"Collie, have you asked Mr. Congreve for Bertha's hand?"

"I have."

"And he refused?"

"Plump and plain."

"Do you think it right to marry Bertha against his will?"

"I do."

"Do you think it's good business?" Davenport's eyes twinkled, but Mr. Collie saw no joke in such a sensible question.

"Davenport, I believe it is," said he, earnestly, leaning forward. "I believe that whatever is right is good business, whether you can figure it out that way at the time or not. And I think this is right because I love Bertha and she loves me."

"Bully for you, young man!" cried the judge. "I wish more of 'em had your nerve."

"Do you think it wise, aside from business, to marry under these circumstances?" continued Davenport.

"Don't cross-examine him too close along that line, Morris," interposed the judge again, as if holding court.

"That's a question most men can answer better after

The Pride of Tellfair

marriage than before, and I don't doubt Collie kin, too."

Collie smiled, but Bertha's beautiful, pallid face relaxed no line of stateliness—perhaps because the remark was at the expense of her sex.

"Don't you both think," continued Davenport, "that it would be better to defer your marriage a short time, and attempt once more to gain Mr. Congreve's consent? Or, failing in that, to give him due notice of your intention to marry? I think you would wound his feelings less in that way, and avoid a great deal of gossip and unpleasant notoriety."

Collie referred the question to Bertha with his eyes. She referred it back again, with her opinion attached—all with her eyes.

"I don't believe he would give his consent," said Collie. "Besides, it's too late now. We've got our license, and everybody will know it by to-morrow."

"Why did you come up here so late, if I may ask?" said Davenport.

"I didn't get the license until after I had closed my store," answered Collie. "Then we started for Marysville. We got within a mile of there when we both came to the conclusion that it would look better to be married in our own town. So we turned around and came back."

"The judge here is in doubt as to his duty. Suppose he refuses to marry you. What will you do?"

"Drive back to Marysville."

"You wouldn't try Squire Henry or any of the preachers?"

"No. We don't care to hawk this job around. It's easy money, and if the judge here don't want it, we will take it out of town. It's nothing to me, except that I'd sooner leave my money with the people that leave their money with me."

The Pride of Tellfair

Walrod cleared his throat, and cast a furtive glance at the pigeon-hole containing his blank marriage certificates.

"What do you think, Morris?" he asked.

"I think you had better marry them."

The squire turned with alacrity, drew out a blank, and began to hunt a pen that would write.

"Where does your mother think you are, Bertha?" asked Morris, while Mr. Collie was answering the necessary questions.

"She thinks I'm to sleep with Carrie Stone."

"I reckon she'll be a little surprised," observed Walrod, with a chuckle. It was a fine night's work for him—the marriage and the will—and he felt good.

For the first time, Bertha confessed her femininity. Her eyes dropped and a red tongue of blood shot through her marble cheek and temple. But she fought it instantly back, and said, haughtily:

"I shall go home as soon as we are married."

"Certainly, Berthy, certainly. You mustn't git mad at a little joke like that, from an old man like me." He suddenly paused. "By George! Morris, we've got to have another witness. It's a poor time of night, too, to wake up a man for a charity deed."

"I'll see that any one who comes is paid well for his time," said Collie, promptly.

"Ring up Hayford's livery-stable, Morris, and get one of them stable-boys up here. They're likely to be playin' poker down there yet."

But Davenport, seeing the brave little bride shrink, said, "No, I'll ask the night operator at the telephone exchange if she can't step over here for a minute."

This he did in spite of Walrod's protest that it would take her an hour to dress. Moreover, he went after her, and prepared her on the way back for what she was to see, so that she stepped into the room without surprise.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Stand up and join your right hands," commanded the judge, without delay. "James, do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife, to love, honor, and so forth, as long as you live?"

"I do."

"Berthy, do you take this man to be your lawful wedded husband, to love, honor, obey, and so forth, as long as you live?"

"I do." Her voice was low, but sweet and clear.

"Then consider yourselves man and wife. And may you never regret it," he added, grimly, in lieu of a prayer.

Collie turned and gave his new wife a kiss. When Davenport stepped over to congratulate her, she gave him a little hand as cold as ice. A tear stood in either eye, though she dashed them quickly, almost fiercely, away.

A great pity filled Davenport's bosom. She was such a feminine thing, so easy to lead, so hard to drive, so soft, so clinging, yearning for love, holding body and soul cheap barter for it. Yet just why he pitied her he might have been puzzled to say. Collie was probably as good a man as she was a woman.

Mr. Collie extended two fingers towards Walrod, with a crisp five-dollar bill, folded lengthwise, between them. Walrod took the bill; but uncertain whether Collie expected any change or not, and not wishing to put any such idea into the young man's mind if it were not already there, he thrust his hand into his trousers-pocket, rattled his keys, and hemmed and hawed. But Collie did not wait for any change, and led Davenport aside.

"Do you think that young telephone woman would accept anything, say a dollar, for her trouble? It's simply a straight matter of business with me, you know, not being acquainted with her."

"Bertha is acquainted with her," said Davenport.

The Pride of Tellfair

"I shouldn't offer her anything. You might offend her. You can show your appreciation later, some other way."

When they had all gone, the newly married pair escorting the operator back to her office, Walrod turned to Davenport with a grin.

"As game a pair of banties as I ever see. I'd give the half of this fee, though, to see Volley Congreve's face when that little lady announces herself as Mrs. James Starkweather Collie."

"I'd give ten times that fee if I hadn't been within a hundred miles of your marriage-shop to-night," said Davenport.

"Well, there's no use in beefin' now," said Norman, cheerfully, as he tucked the bill away in his vest-pocket. "The deed is did."

"Yes, and people will wonder how I happened to be so handy."

"Damn the people! I never knowed you to be so thin-skinned before."

XLIV

IT was the marital duty of Pontiac Jones, county clerk, to convey to Mrs. Jones such noteworthy news as came to his ears, professionally or otherwise. Therefore, when he returned to his house, after having been called to the front door at nine o'clock at night and taken over to the court-house, he informed his waiting and curious wife that he had granted a marriage license to James Collie and Bertha Congreve. Mrs. Jones promptly threw a shawl over her head and ran over to tell Mrs. Lewis. Mrs. Lewis chanced to have company — three ladies — and each of these ladies chanced to live in a different neighborhood in Tellfair. Thus the story was started on what may be called the home, back-yard, or unofficial route.

It was the legal duty of Mr. Jones to post on the walls of his office the names of all parties to whom a marriage license had been granted. This Pontiac did the first thing in the morning. Half an hour later, old Nabor Heffner, thumping around the court-house with his cane after his daily batch of gossip, saw the notice. Doubting his eyes, he fumbled for his spectacles, put them tremblingly on, scanned the paper for a full minute at an eight-inch range, and then turned and gazed over the top of his spectacles at Pontiac Jones's back for another full minute.

"Say, Pont! Is this a joke?"

Mr. Jones finished the entry he was making, launched a liberal quantity of tobacco-juice towards a brown

The Pride of Tellfair

earthenware spittoon the size of a small tub, and then swung around in his swivel-chair, quite red in the face.

"Say, Heffner, do you suppose for a minute that this county elected me to office to play jokes? Now let me tell you, once for all, Heffner, that whenever you see anything on that wall, with my name under it, you can bank on it. And whenever—"

But Heffner had already gone, *stamp! stamp! stamp!* down the hall, with unwonted speed. He stopped an instant at the register of deeds' office to announce the news, and also stuck his head into the sheriff's office, but no one was there. Then he made his way rapidly down Main Street, discharging his news at everybody within range, and even bawling it across the street, but losing no time. He stopped momentarily at the post-office, at Feversham's drug store, at Hemingway's grocery store, the bank, Hinckley's, and one or two other places, until at last he brought up at Harmon's shoe-shop, the last place of business on the street.

Thus the story was started on what may be called the down-town, commercial, or official route. Travelling these two routes, a collision was inevitable at more than one dinner-table that day, the husband with one version, the wife with the other.

There was no collision at the manse table,* however, for Mr. Bowman, shut in his study all morning and wrestling with an advanced thought on predestination, had heard no echo from the outside world. He brought his abstraction to the table with him, and received the startling news from Alice almost without comment. She was disappointed, of course, but not hopeless.

"That disposes of *your* theory," she ventured, with a sly little laugh.

The theory she referred to was that Bertha secretly loved Davenport; but Alice did not wish to be any plainer before ten-year-old David, who had a habit of

The Pride of Tellfair

soaking up a great deal of conversation to which he was apparently oblivious. He was at present struggling with a piece of Tellfair County native beef, and held his fork in his fist like a dagger.

"Hold your fork right, David," said his father, briefly. "How many times shall I have to tell you about that?" He wasn't in the best of humor, and he had cut the steak and served the mashed potatoes with something like asperity.

"I'm afraid the steak is tough," said Alice, in behalf of the boy.

"It's robbery to sell a man meat like this," said Bowman, crossly. "If I could do it without kicking up a row in the church, I'd refuse to buy another ounce from that man Stark, and tell him plainly the reason why. Who told you about Bertha?"

"Mrs. Beaumont. She brought in some tea she had borrowed."

"That accounts for the green tea instead of black, I suppose," he observed, glancing at his cup. He did not like green tea. "I don't know that it upsets any of my theories. I still believe there was an attachment in that quarter. It was not reciprocated, towards the end, for some reason, and this is the result."

"Arthur, you don't mean that!" she expostulated. "That is doing Morris a gross injustice. He *never* reciprocated it."

"That is your opinion, Alice," said he, dryly. "Mine is that he did."

When he adopted that tone, long experience had taught Alice that further argument would be vain; and she now dropped the subject with a grace that might have made an angel envious.

After-dinner events did not improve Mr. Bowman's temper. Just before he left the house for his round of afternoon calls, the bell rang, and Bradley Hayford

The Pride of Tellfair

was ushered into the sitting-room. Unwelcome or questionable callers on the pastor were always diverted there, from which point they could be more easily dismissed. Others were taken up-stairs to the study.

"Elder," began the horseman, in his straight-from-the-shoulder style, "if you can let me have that money you owe me, within a day or two, I'd appreciate it. I don't want to push you, but I need it. I'm buying a farm west of town—the old Stockbridge place—and I'm scraping together all the cash I can to make a first payment on it."

Bowman knit his brows. In his heart he thought it a piece of impudence for a man able to buy a thirty-thousand-dollar stock-farm to dun a poor minister for two hundred dollars.

"It will be very inconvenient for me to raise the money just at this time, Hayford," said he.

"The note's overdue two months now," suggested the other, mildly.

"I'm aware of that," answered Bowman, loftily, "and you can't regret it any more than I do. It's very embarrassing to me to have a thing of this kind outstanding; but I am entirely dependent upon my salary, and it is not large, as you probably know."

"Any objection to my discounting the note at the bank? Shaw's a pillar in your church, and I suppose he'd be glad to accommodate you in that way, although he don't hanker after overdue paper as a rule."

Bowman would have liked to throttle the man, although it is not at all certain that Hayford meant to be insulting. But throttling was against Bowman's principles, in the first place, and in the second place Hayford's bull neck did not look as if it would throttle easily.

"I certainly should object to your discounting it at the bank," he answered. "The fact that Mr. Shaw is

The Pride of Tellfair

a member of my church makes me more reluctant, if anything, to having it taken there. I aim to keep my private and official affairs entirely separate. Besides, when I gave you the note it was distinctly understood that it should not be offered at the bank for discount."

Hayford's pale-blue eyes filled with an ugly light.

"I suppose it was just as distinctly understood that it would be paid when due," said he.

"If you feel that way about it, Mr. Hayford," said the preacher, promptly, "I shall pay it at once, at any cost. If you will call here to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock you will find your money waiting." And he moved suggestively towards the door. Hayford arose.

"You got the money at the stable. Maybe it would be just as well to pay it back there. I'll be *there* at two o'clock."

"Very well," said Bowman, smoothly. But he was white with anger.

He was in no mood now for pastoral calls, and he returned to his study. He had made up his mind to ask Lucius Shaw for the money to take up the note with, in spite of the fact that he aimed to keep his private and official affairs separate. Shaw was not only a member of Bowman's church, but also one of his elders. The board was to meet that night to consider the purchase of a piano for the Sunday-school room, in place of the wheezy old organ which had been moved out of the auditorium when the pipe-organ was put in. After the meeting, Bowman would have a good opportunity to lay the matter of a loan before the banker.

The day proved an evil one throughout, however, for Arthur Bowman. The board divided on the piano question, and, to the minister's surprise and chagrin, Lucius Shaw, apostle of progress and spirit of enterprise, lined up with the conservatives and bluntly an-

The Pride of Tellfair

nounced himself as content with the present instrument.

"I gleaned from our conversation the other day, Brother Shaw, that you favored a piano," observed Bowman, mildly.

"I perhaps gave that impression," answered the banker. "In fact, I did lean to that opinion then. But the Sunday-school room needs a new carpet and it needs plastering, and I think the money had better be spent for one or the other of these, or both, than for a piano. I don't see anything very wrong with that organ. We got along with it for years in the main room."

"This is an age of progress, Lucius," said one of the members, jocosely. He did not care much which way the issue went.

"There is another thing to be considered," continued the minister. "Miss Catlin says that pumping the organ is very exhausting work—the bellows are in bad shape and seem to be beyond repair—and she has intimated that if we don't get a piano very soon she will have to give up her position as organist."

"I think her place could be filled," returned Shaw, with provoking indifference.

"I am not so sure about that. Miss Catlin has been very faithful. She has considerable talent, and has been very successful in working with the children on special occasions. I feel as though her wishes were entitled to some consideration."

"Undoubtedly," said Shaw, in a tone which implied that they were not. "If Miss Catlin wishes a rest, I think my daughter Amelia could be induced to take the place—for a time, at least. She isn't anxious for the work, of course," he added, smiling, as if nobody were anxious for church-work, "and she hasn't Miss Catlin's talent—perhaps. But I fancy she could fill the position acceptably."

The Pride of Tellfair

Arthur Bowman was of the opinion, privately, that Elizabeth Catlin would work her legs off on the old organ's pedals before she would resign in favor of Amelia Shaw, but this was not the time and place to say so. Then old Mr. Feversham, Tom's father, spoke up, running his fingers through his long, snowy hair.

"I fear it would create feeling, Lucius, if we were to make a change in organists now."

"But if Miss Catlin resigns?" asked Shaw, complacently.

"I think, with our minister, that her wishes are entitled to some respect, and that we ought not to virtually force her to resign," answered the aged peacemaker. "She has played in the Sunday-school since she was fifteen years old, and a tenure of that length of time cannot be lightly set aside."

XLV

IT was finally decided to leave the matter to a vote. The vote resulted in a tie, throwing the issue into the minister's hands, who otherwise would have had no vote. He glanced over the board. If Davenport had been there, he reflected, as he ought to have been, his vote would have gone for the piano, there would have been no tie, and he (Bowman) would have escaped an exceedingly trying position. To side with Shaw would make the pastor's loan certain and easy; to side against him might jeopardize the loan, and would certainly make it embarrassing. Yet his duty was clear, and he did not hesitate. After saying that if Mr. Shaw and his colleagues could be in the Sunday-school room as much as he was, he believed they would take a different view of the question, he added that he felt constrained to vote for the piano.

Shaw arose with an acrid smile, and buttoned his coat.

"That settles it. I abide by the majority's wish. The little children can now go on for another year or two stubbing their toes in the holes in the carpet and occasionally getting a piece of plaster on their heads to keep them awake."

This was certainly ungracious. Rather than ask him for a loan after that, Arthur Bowman would have gone to prison. But the money had to be got somewhere, and that quickly. The next morning he climbed Davenport's stairs, rather slowly. He had borrowed money of Davenport before, and without the least trouble. He

The Pride of Tellfair

had no doubt he could do so now. Yet for some reason it went against the grain this time, and he would almost as soon have gone to Lucius Shaw. He paused at the outer door an instant, wondering if Miss Priestley had ever been imprudent enough to tell Davenport of the advice he had once given her, one Sunday after church. Another thing, he had never noticed his heart flutter so after climbing a flight of stairs. He must have a touch of indigestion.

"Hello!" said Davenport, familiarly. "I was just beginning to think that you had crossed me off your visiting-list. Take that rocking-chair."

Davenport was by no means a shy man, but he could never bring himself to call his pastor "Arthur." And as "Mr. Bowman" would have sounded stiff, considering their intimacy and nearly equal ages, and "Bowman" a little impertinent, he usually called him nothing, and made good the omission by an added familiarity. Occasionally, though, he jocularly called him "Elder." At the same time he did not hesitate to call Mrs. Bowman, whom he had known for years, "Alice."

They talked at random. The meeting of the board of elders came up. Bowman expressed his regret at Davenport's absence, and Davenport explained that he had spent the previous day in Freeport, and did not get back until a late hour—nearly one o'clock. Then a pause.

"Morris, I need some money," said Bowman.

"Not a strikingly original need," answered Davenport, amiably, as he sharpened a pencil. "How much do you need?"

He knew pretty certainly before he asked, for Hayford was not close-mouthed when he felt aggrieved, as perhaps few men are. But, then, Davenport's knowledge of private affairs would have astounded a great many people.

The Pride of Tellfair

"Two hundred dollars."

Davenport reached for his check-book.

"Perhaps you would prefer it in currency," said he, pausing.

"I would, yes, if you have that much about." He would rather not have cashed one of Davenport's checks at the bank for such an amount.

"I haven't it, but I can get it."

He wrote out a check and stepped down to the bank with it himself instead of sending his stenographer—another piece of delicacy not lost on the minister. Yet somehow his gratitude refused to rise.

"If you'll give me a blank note, Morris, I'll fill it out," said he, on Davenport's return. "I don't know when I shall be able to pay this back, but—"

"Never mind a note," answered Davenport, carelessly. "Just write on that slip of paper, 'Due Morris Davenport, two hundred dollars,' and sign your name."

Bowman had fancied that the lawyer would refuse any written evidence of the debt, as he had in former instances. He was therefore slightly piqued at Davenport's accepting it, even in this informal way. Yet he could not repress a feeling of admiration for the man before him—so frank, so prompt, so quietly generous. On the heels of this emotion, though, came one less commendable. It was something akin to envy. Bowman was not of Davenport's fibre. He knew that he could not have made money if he had tried; that he could not mix with men in the way Davenport mixed. He knew that he lacked physical courage. He also lacked that fearlessness of failure without which there can be no real success for a man. Lastly, he lacked that rush of life which made Davenport glory in conflict, not for the spoils it might bring, but for the pure love of conflict.

Bowman did not forget his own powers—his in-

The Pride of Tellfair

sight into the human heart, an almost feminine tact, a perfect self-control, and an almost total absence of prejudice. But at the best, he reflected, moodily, he was only a fox while Davenport was a lion. In which, of course, he did himself and others like him an injustice.

"Here are some very interesting papers—to me," observed Davenport, sociably, taking them up. "They are the abstract and deed of the Holbrook farm, out in Turtle township. I bought the farm on Tuesday, held it two days, sold it on Thursday, and made two thousand dollars."

Bowman started.

"That's more money than I make in a year," said he.

"It's more than I usually make in two days," answered Morris, laughing. Perhaps he was not wholly blind to the operations going on behind Bowman's high, white, scholarly forehead, and rather enjoyed the situation.

"It's easy money for you, Morris, but somebody sweat for it," the minister could not help saying.

"Yes, I have thought of that," said Davenport. "But with me it's come easy, go easy."

"In that case I don't know that you could do better than let fifty dollars of it go towards the piano for the Sunday-school," suggested Bowman, only half in earnest.

"I'll do it," said Davenport, and wrote Bowman a check for the amount. "But did you ever stop to think just who it was that sweat for that money? Not the man who has just bought the farm, for he will make money on the investment. Not Holbrook, who has just sold the farm, for he bought the land for thirty dollars an acre and sold it for a hundred, and has lived off it for a quarter of a century besides, and lived well. Not the first white man that owned it, for he got the tract and thousands of acres besides from the Indians

The Pride of Tellfair

for a barrel of cheap whiskey. Not the Indians, for they never did anything for it except to hunt over it."

"I should say the people who sweat for that money were the laborers who have worked on the land all these years and improved it."

"No, for they received a due wage for their labor. Now I'll tell you who it was. Not to go back too far, it was the people who made the State of Illinois, guaranteeing protection to life and property. It was the people who built the cities of this and neighboring States, creating a market for the wheat and corn and stock which came off that farm. It was the railroads which made it possible to carry this wheat and corn and stock to a market. It was the men who made the steel which made the railroads possible. These people, thousands upon thousands in number, sweat for that money as I see it."

"Then why not divide it among them?" asked Bowman.

"It will be divided among them, in a way—the only way, really, because a literal division would mean less than a penny apiece and benefit nobody. Suppose I spend the two thousand dollars I have made just as selfishly as I know how, and buy a blooded race-horse with it. The money goes to the stock-breeder first. He parcels it out in a dozen, a hundred quarters—to the railroad, to farmers, to his hired men, to the county and State for taxes, to his butcher and baker, his wife's dressmaker, and so on. They each, in turn, parcel it out again in as many more quarters."

"But you have the horse."

"Certainly. But what real good does he do me? Besides, he is paid for. Every man who has helped, in the most indirect way, to raise him, has been rewarded. Here's another thought. If there hadn't been a man rich enough to accumulate two thousand dollars, like

The Pride of Tellfair

myself, that race-horse would have been impossible; and all the people who helped to make him possible would have had to work at something else. This would have thrown them into competition with another and lower class of laborers, and everybody, all around, would have been worse off."

His hazel eyes gleamed good-naturedly, and it was hard to say whether he was entirely in earnest or not. Bowman laughed and shrugged his shoulders as he rose.

"The community has imposed upon you, I see, by making you an involuntary trustee of its funds, as it were." At the door he added, in the same jocular vein, tinged with irony, "It seems to me that you might have had enough influence with your ex-stenographer to throw her marriage my way."

"Could you have married her with a clear conscience?"

"You witnessed it with a clear conscience, didn't you? I fear, though," he added, more seriously, "that what she thinks is love will turn out to be only a passing fancy."

"That's a question, elder," said Davenport, owlishly. "A woman's heart isn't the easiest thing in the world to fathom. Sometimes she is in love when you think she *isn't*, and sometimes she isn't when you think she *is*. Ever notice that?"

"Oh yes," answered the minister, evasively, hastily opening the door. Again he wondered if Josephine had been indiscreet and told Davenport things she had better have kept to herself.

XLVI

HALF an hour later, Mr. Bowman sat in the Priestleys' sitting-room, toasting his thick soles before a brisk fire in the grate. Josephine had seen him pass the house, rather slowly, and go into Catlin's. Five minutes later he repassed the house. When he hove into sight the third time, she was rather curious, and still more so when he turned into her gate.

He did not explain his hesitancy at entering, and, if he had any business, he let it wait. He merely asked how Victoria was, and, after apologizing for his morning call, told Josephine that he had been over to Catlin's to apprise Elizabeth that the Sunday-school piano was a certainty. Josephine felt that he had come to say something about Bertha's marriage—perhaps to justify the warning he had given her. Just how he could do that she did not see.

"Wouldn't *you* like work in the Sunday-school, Miss Josephine?" asked Bowman, while on the subject. "You would make an ideal chorister, and that is something that we need badly."

Josephine shook her head promptly.

"No, thank you."

"Don't you feel it your duty to take a more active part in church-work?"

"No. If I did I should take it."

"You are perfectly satisfied with yourself in that respect?" he asked, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Perfectly."

The Pride of Tellfair

This was not strictly true; but she and the Reverend Arthur Bowman had fallen into a habit of sparring in this way, and Truth occasionally got an accidental blow.

Bowman stretched out a long leg towards the fire, and settled in his chair. It was a comfortable chair, and his attitude looked as if it might be good until noon.

"Miss Josephine," said he, bringing the tips of his long, white fingers together and smiling significantly, "I am conscious of just the slightest friction whenever you and I meet of late."

She did not deny it.

"I date it," he continued, "from the day that I took upon myself the responsibility, as a friend—rather foolishly, perhaps—of pointing out a reef in the course you were sailing."

"Only it wasn't a reef, was it? Just what sailors call a *wind*-reef, wasn't it, and laugh at land-lubbers for getting scared at?"

"I had every reason then to believe that there was danger in your course. I believe yet, in spite of Bertha's marriage, that there was danger. If Davenport had asked her to marry him at that time, she would have done it in an instant. I am not blaming him," he added. Maybe the fat roll of bills in his pocket burned him. "Yet I do think that he unconsciously encouraged her; and there was a time, before you came, I think, when he did not know his own mind on that subject."

"Your warning, Mr. Bowman, did not alter my feelings towards you in the least," said she. It was evident that she did not mean to discuss Davenport's motives or conduct.

"What did alter them, then?" he asked.

"I would rather not say, Mr. Bowman," said she. "It is a rather embarrassing theme for me. I don't know that discussing it would do either of us any good."

The Pride of Tellfair

"I insist on your telling me. I have a right to know." He could tolerate opposition from a man, after a fashion; but in a woman, by whom his ministerial authority was seldom questioned, it was insufferable.

"You have no such right," said she, quietly. "Yet, if you insist, I'll waive that and tell you. I don't think it will make you any happier, or us any better friends; but perhaps it is just as well for you to know the truth. I have held aloof from you more or less because I saw that Alice misunderstood our intimacy. Whenever you and I got to discussing any subject, Alice was usually left out; not because she couldn't talk as well as I, but simply because an argument is a little vehicle in which only two can ride comfortably, although a third can be stowed in. She has never said a word to me about this, and she'd die before she would; but I saw that she was bothered. She felt that whenever I was present with you and her, she had to take a position in the background. And it was true. I think you will admit that we did argue too much. She is the dearest little woman in the world; I love her, and I wouldn't give her pain, or have anything come between us, for anything on earth."

"My dear young woman, you were never more mistaken in your life," exclaimed Bowman, relieved to find that the trouble was nothing more serious than this. "My wife realizes that I am a public man. She knows that very often it is my duty to steer conversation away from trivial or conventional subjects, and give it a turn which will exclude anything like general participation in it. On such occasions she is perfectly willing to stand aside. Really, you do her an injustice. And you have frightened yourself with a bugbear besides." He locked his fingers behind his black, glossy hair, which was a little too long to look neat, and smiled complacently. "If that is all that has come between us—"

The Pride of Tellfair

He paused an instant as the hall door opened and some one stepped into the front room. Josephine supposed it was Miss Hunter, the nurse, and hoped for a diversion which would send her spiritual adviser on his way. But she waited for him to finish.

"If that is all that has come between us," he concluded, "we can be good friends once more."

He said it in a round, penetrating, pulpit tone. The next instant Alice Bowman's sweet, thin face parted the portières. She might have been a little paler than usual. Josephine's heart gave one great leap. If Alice could only have heard some other words—or *all* the other words! If Mr. Bowman had only been making an afternoon instead of a morning call! If he had not sunk quite so low in his chair, and had not looked so comfortable, so much at home!

Alice carried a dish covered with a napkin, and Josephine hastened to relieve her of it.

"Some tapioca pudding for Victoria," said Alice, simply. "I am quite sure it won't hurt her."

Bowman arose, without haste or confusion, at the sound of his wife's voice. Josephine admired him, for once, for his self-control.

"Hello, Ally! On my trail again? Well, I can give a good account of myself. See what I've got!" He stepped playfully behind her and, with an arm on each of her shoulders, he stretched Davenport's fifty-dollar check before her eyes. "For the new piano. At that rate we can have a piano and a new carpet, too. I just came from Elizabeth's."

"I suppose she is happy?"

"Perfectly delighted."

"How good of Morris!" she murmured.

She was undoubtedly pleased, but her voice lacked spontaneity, Josephine fancied. Besides, Bowman was overplaying his part, just a little, she thought, and she

The Pride of Tellfair

was relieved when he seized his hat and hurried off, suddenly remembering that the golden morning hours were slipping away unimproved.

"I might have gone with him," said Alice. "I can't stay but a minute."

"Oh, you must run up-stairs and say hello to Victoria. She is feeling so much better this morning. It was very sweet and thoughtful of you, Alice, to bring in the tapioca."

They went up to Victoria. Afterwards, Josephine got out a song which she was to sing at the Christmas entertainment at the church, and sang it for Alice. After that she got out a big pasteboard box full of little things she had made for Christmas gifts—dainty white aprons, handkerchiefs, handkerchief-cases, sofa-pillow covers, pin-cushions, and other things dear to the feminine heart—and showed them to Alice with a running fire of comment.

"This is for Delphine Delaroche, the one who I told you broke her engagement the day before she was to have been married, and married another man, an old sweetheart, within a week. It sounds terrible, I know, but if you only knew her you would understand. She'll know that we are very poor when she gets only this, but she'll love me just as much as when I sent her a brooch of pearls two years ago. These handkerchiefs are for her sister Louise. Two years ago about a dozen families of us had a Christmas-tree, and Louise put an immense rag-baby on for me. I had it a week before I found out that it was made out of a pair of the most beautiful imported night-gowns. Don't you think this is pretty—not the workmanship—that's wretched—but the color and design? It's the first I ever made, and I know you would like to laugh. These I haven't decided on. I think I'll give Mother Shipman one. I'll have to give Miss Hunter and Mrs. Brannigan something, too—they

The Pride of Tellfair

have been so faithful. I want to give each of my pupils something, too—just some little thing to show that I remembered them. Those brushes are for Jean. He's such a neat old man, always brushing his clothes. You can't see what is wrapped in *this* paper, but if you are real good you may some time, maybe."

She opened another box full of laces, delicate white fabrics, silks, ribbons, and so on.

"Poor Victoria! She had just got started on her presents when she was taken sick. I have finished some of them, but of course I couldn't find time for all. Besides, she wanted to do them herself. That is the only thing that gives them any value, of course. She's doing a little at them now, but Miss Hunter sees that it is a very little. She even tries to stop *me*. We have both come to love her, she is so watchful and sympathetic. Both her parents are dead, too."

"You poor dear!" said Alice, affectionately. "When did you ever find time to do all this? You mustn't try to remember everybody. They don't expect it. They don't make as much of Christmas here in the North, Arthur says, as they do in the South."

But something was lacking through it all. They both talked too fluently, were both too eager. In the hall they instinctively paused. It was the first time they had ever tried to deceive each other, and both were suffering and loath to part.

"Alice, something has come between us," said Josephine, frankly.

Alice's sensitive nostrils quivered.

"Oh, thank you, dear, for saying it! I didn't have the courage. I overheard what Arthur said about your being friends again. I know it meant nothing. I have too much faith in both of you. But I knew that it wasn't meant for my ears, and that you both knew that I had overheard it, and, to save my life, Josie, I couldn't

The Pride of Tellfair

be natural. I was afraid you might think that I wouldn't understand. So I went out of my way to show you that I did understand. But it's all right now."

"And I went out of *my* way to show you that I wasn't afraid that you wouldn't understand."

She drew the slender little woman to her and kissed her, and for a moment they stood cheek to cheek—rose and lily—the tears trickling down their faces. But Josephine meant to go on and make a clean breast of it.

"When you stepped in, Alice, we were—"

"*Please* don't tell me!" exclaimed Alice. "I want to take you on trust—I want to show you that I can. If you tell me I shall think you are afraid that I can't."

"Then I won't tell you."

"Do you think—do you think that Arthur suspected anything?" asked Alice, wiping away the last of the tears. "He has such a horror of a jealous woman, and I have tried so hard to show him that I am not—though I am dreadfully afraid that I am. But *you* don't think I am, do you?"

"Not a bit of it. I couldn't love you if you were."

"But if Arthur attempts to explain I shall know that he thinks—well, it will hurt me awfully."

"You mustn't be so sensitive. I don't think he will attempt to explain. But if he does, it will simply be a proof of his trust in you. He wouldn't take the trouble to explain to a jealous woman."

"I'd sooner have him show his trust in some other way," said Alice, smiling.

After Mrs. Bowman had gone, Josephine stood at the front door for a moment, thinking. Then she stepped quickly over to Catlin's. Their telephone, whose use they had tendered her and Victoria, was in the front hall, and she knew that she could talk through it without being overheard by any of the family. Muffling the bells with her hand, she rang up Central and asked for

The Pride of Tellfair

the Reverend Mr. Bowman's house. She was relieved when he answered in person. She feared he might not have gone directly home, in spite of the golden morning hours slipping away.

"If you take my advice," said she, speaking as low as possible, "you will make no allusion to what occurred at our house this morning to *anybody*."

"Thank you. I was in doubt. Mum's the word."

"Now, was that just honest?" she asked herself, as she hung up the receiver. "And if the Central girl happened to be listening, as they say she does, what a beautiful shock she must have got! The Reverend Mr. Bowman and Miss Josephine Priestley—morning call from the former—caution from the latter—'Mum's the word'! What tidy material for a scandal! I ought not to have done it. Besides, he'll want me to explain when he sees me, and that will give him a chance to open the whole question again."

When she reached the street—there was no back-yard gate in the wall—she could still descry, through the vista of elms, a figure which she knew to be Alice's.

"It wasn't exactly honest," she repeated to herself.

XLVII

VICTORIA, using Miss Hunter and Josephine as crutches, came down-stairs after tea for the first time since her sickness. In her loose-flowing, pale-blue gown, clinging weblike to her wasted form, and with her carelessly dressed hair drifting over her forehead and temples, she was a mere ghost of her former self. Her hands were little, white claws, the cords stood out on her neck, and there was an angularity about her throat and chin where before there had been only a tempting fulness. Even her eyes, the last organs to surrender to disease, were hungry, wistful pools. Yet she was touchingly beautiful, swaying before every breath like a pillar of mist, and drifting along as noiselessly as a wraith.

At the foot of the stairs she paused, panting and laughing half hysterically.

"The dear old hall!" she gasped.

In the front room she paused again, drinking in every familiar detail with thirsty eyes, trembling with excitement, clutching at her supports, smiling, whimpering, laughing, crying.

This weakness was more trying to Josephine than even the white, deathlike trance which had accompanied the crisis of the fever, when they had all stood in silence around the bed, waiting for the oscillating hand on the dial of life and death to stop and point the sick one's fate. It was the same that morning when Victoria had sat at an east window, sunning herself. As she quick-

The Pride of Tellfair

ened under the warmth, and held up her bloodless hands to let the sun shine through and paint them a waxen pink, and exultantly flung out her loose hair until her head was like a sea of molten brass and gold, crowing like a child, Josephine had stealthily dropped a tear. She knew that time would strengthen the weakened mind as well as the body, but it was all so pitiful.

Victoria, with a shawl over her shoulders, was placed in a big chair before the blazing library grate, which the frugal Campeau had for once piled with wood. For a time she was almost gay with her nurse and the motherly Mrs. Brannigan. She even sent for Jean and had him tell her once more the old story of how her great-grandmother, with her terrified children clinging to her skirts, had fearlessly stepped to the door of her château to quell a mad, revolutionary mob, and died. But after the nurse and Mrs. Brannigan had withdrawn her spirits seemed spent, and she fell into a silent mood.

"How much is my sickness going to cost you, Josephine?" she asked, abruptly.

"What has put that into your head?" asked Josephine, evasively. "I'm too glad to have you well again to think of dollars and cents."

"It has been in my head a good while. How much does Miss Hunter charge?"

"You mustn't talk about such things now, dear. Miss Hunter wouldn't let you sit up if she knew. It's all provided for."

"I want to know. Please don't make me ask again. I'm tired."

"Eighteen dollars a week," answered Josephine.

"And Mrs. Brannigan?"

"Five."

"Twenty-three for the two. They've been here six weeks—one hundred and thirty-eight dollars. Then

The Pride of Tellfair

there are the doctor's bill, medicines, delicacies, and other extras. I should have cost you less if I had died in the beginning."

The words wrung a cry of pain from Josephine.

"Oh, sister, do you want to break my heart?"

Dropping her hoop of fancy-work, she knelt by Victoria's chair, with an upturned, pleading face. The latter gazed into the fire with an Indian indifference wholly foreign to her nature, and was silent.

"What are you going to do about it?" she asked, finally.

"I am going to borrow the money from Morris Davenport."

"There was a time when you wouldn't borrow from him. I have broken your pride down pretty well."

Josephine winced. The motion was not lost upon Victoria, but she merely looked down a little curiously out of her great, hollow eyes. The writhing of a severed worm would have moved her more, once. The gloom of the Valley of the Shadow of Death still lurked in the recesses of her mind, and the things of earth, even a sister's pain, loomed not so large as once.

"You will borrow it, but how will you pay it back?" she asked.

"We shall pay it back together, dear, when you are well and able to work again. That won't be long now."

"I'm so tired; I don't want to work any more," answered Victoria, with a sigh. "I don't want to live any more."

Again Josephine winced. Could doctor and nurse both be wrong when they said that her sister was on the high road to recovery? Did not people sometimes die merely because they were tired of living? The thought frightened her.

"You must live for me, dear, if not for yourself," said she, earnestly. "I have no one left now but you. If

The Pride of Tellfair

you should die, what would I do? But you are not going to die. You are going to get well. You must know that, if you will just stop to think. You are weak yet, and that is why you are despondent. People who have been as sick as you were always are. You must try to want to live, if not for your own sake, then for mine. It isn't right to give up. It's a sin. If you should die just because you didn't care to live, it would be as wicked as if you had killed yourself with a pistol. You were happy enough this morning, and you will be happy again to-morrow morning. You were happy just a little while ago. You are tired now. Morris will be here to see you in a few minutes. Miss Hunter saw him on the street to-day, and told him how strong and well you are getting, and I don't want you to disappoint him. You won't, will you? And you must be bright the minute he comes in, for Miss Hunter says you can't stay with us but a moment. She's afraid you will over-tax yourself. You will be happy, won't you?"

"Y-e-s," said the other, slowly, like a spoiled child. A moment later she added, "I dreamed that Bertha Congreve and Mr. Collie were married."

"You didn't dream it. Elizabeth Catlin told you. Don't you remember when she was over to see you yesterday morning? I guess you were sleepy."

Victoria nodded; then her face suddenly lighted with recollection.

"She brought me some soup," she said.

"Yes—and you ate it all up, every drop!" cried Josephine, gayly.

"No—did I?" she asked, suspiciously.

"Why, yes. Miss Hunter was so surprised. She said she never saw such an appetite in a sick girl."

"Then did some one tell me that you and Morris were married?"

"No, you must have dreamed that. You didn't think

The Pride of Tellfair

"I'd get married and go off and leave you while you were sick, did you?"

"Will you when I'm well?" asked the invalid, darkening.

"Why, no—not leave you," answered Josephine, and she would have blushed just the same had she been talking to a child. "You shall always be with me wherever I am, as long as you want to be."

"You think that after I get well I sha'n't want to be," suggested Victoria, half resentfully.

"Why, what foolishness!" cried Josephine, with a ringing laugh. Even Victoria had to join her in it. Then came another thoughtful pause.

"Have any of my pupils come to ask about me?"

"Lots of them—time and again." Josephine named half a dozen or more.

"Didn't Willie Richards come?" she asked, with visible disappointment.

"I didn't see him. But I was away so much with my own pupils that I didn't see a great many who called. Miss Hunter or Mrs. Brannigan would know."

"Please ask them."

Mrs. Brannigan, however, had gone home for a little while, and Miss Hunter was not sure. She had taken the names of all who had called, but her memory was poor. To please the sick girl, though, she stepped to the library door.

"If I haven't got the names mixed, Victoria," said she, "he wore knee-breeches and a double-breasted jacket, with a sailor collar, although he was quite a large boy—almost too large, it struck me, for that kind of a suit. He carried a watch with a silver chain in an outside pocket. His hair was light and curly, and he had the most angelic eyes. Was that he?"

Victoria nodded, and Miss Hunter retired, with a smile at Josephine.

The Pride of Tellfair

"He told me one afternoon that he loved me," said Victoria, with a curiously flushed face. "He said he knew he was too young yet to marry, and that I was several years older than he; but that when he grew up the difference would not be so great. He said that his own mother was three years older than his father. Then he asked me, with a quivering chin, if I could give him any hope. The dear little man!" she exclaimed, with misty eyes. "I wanted to snatch him to my breast and kiss his pain away—for I knew he was in pain. But I did not dare. So I said that of course I was a little surprised, but was glad that he had told me; and that, as the time was a long way off yet, we would just let matters stand and see how we both felt later. He said he knew that *he* would never change"—her voice broke tenderly—"and asked if he might kiss me to seal our compact. But he added that he shouldn't expect to do it again until I had given him a definite answer. I can taste his sweet, girlish lips yet."

Josephine was busy with her own thoughts. She gave a key to them, though Victoria did not know it, when she said, "One would hardly expect such restraint and fine sense of honor in a little fellow—as not to want to kiss you again until he had a perfect right. You will probably never get a proposal that will give you a purer joy than that one, dear."

"I don't expect to. I have been better for it ever since. And it would have hurt me," she added, with a little catch in her laugh, "if he hadn't called to ask after me."

"I can find out from Mrs. Brannigan how often he came."

"No, I wish you wouldn't," said Victoria, quickly, and she was actually blushing. "I—I would rather take him on trust."

XLVIII

WHEN a man buys flowers he is likely to be governed by the florist's unit of a dozen. Davenport, with characteristic prodigality, brought Victoria half an armful of carnations, which he had bought in the city, and tumbled them into her lap as though they were dandelions. She fairly trembled with joy over the cool, fragrant heap, while Josephine herself, with a little cry, dropped to her knees and buried her face in the flowers. Then the watchful Miss Hunter came to take Victoria to bed, and Josephine excused herself for a moment to assist them up the stairs.

"Shall we stay in here?" she asked, returning.

"By all means. It is so cosey, and somehow I feel particularly inclined to a cosey place to-night."

Josephine dropped her eyes and stepped rather hastily to the lamp, which had not yet been lighted. This was the first time she had seen Davenport since Bertha's marriage, and her fingers fumbled the matches.

"Why won't the fire do?" asked Morris. "It furnishes light enough for me, and of a superior quality, to my notion. If it did for you and Victoria, it ought to do for you and me."

The big grate, relic of a day when firewood was cheap, was flooding the carpet and rug with a red glow, and making the chairs and Davenport's head and shoulders dance in great, blurred shadows on the opposite wall and ceiling. The bookcases advanced or receded at the whim of the fire-sprites, and the grave plaster busts

The Pride of Tellfair

on top of them cut the most astounding capers. Occasionally, a little rocket arose with a snap from the hot wood, and burst in mid-air into a cluster of meteors, which consumed themselves before reaching the hearth.

"I don't suppose it would make any difference," said Josephine, hesitating.

"None in the world."

"I don't suppose it would have any weight with you if it did," she added.

"Oh yes," said he, mockingly. "Anything remotely suggestive of impropriety would have my instant condemnation."

"You are feeling good to-night," said she, yielding in the matter of the lamp, and sitting down.

"Yes, I am, and I'll share my good news with you. First, the supreme court of this State has just decided a case in favor of my client. Secondly, I got a letter to-day from the new railroad which runs through Harvey, six miles west of here, retaining me as their local counsel, and enclosing an annual pass over their line. That makes four that I carry now. Third, I have rented that house of mine next to the Baptist parsonage; and, fourth, I beat Marmaduke Blaine by two rods in a little brush we had on the road this afternoon. To understand thoroughly the value of the last, you must know that Marmaduke takes more pride in his horses than he does in his family."

"I don't doubt it. Most horse-fanciers do, I think," said she. He smiled—a playful, tender smile—and she added, wistfully, "Success is so easy for you, Morris."

Her words pleased him—how could they help it?—but he answered, frankly, "No, it is not always easy. I don't tell many people, but I sometimes think that I go through more drudgery to accomplish what I do than any other man living. And the drudgery doesn't always win, either. But I don't talk about my defeats.

The Pride of Tellfair

It isn't good business, as Mr. Collie would say. I smile and talk about my successes."

She flushed slightly at Collie's name, but asked, coolly, "Is that just honest?"

"Oughtn't we always be cheerful?"

"Yes, but I don't know whether we ought to smile outside when we are not smiling inside. It seems a little hypocritical. And one can't smile inside after suffering defeat. At least, *I* can't."

"But oughtn't we be cheerful outside for the sake of example?"

"Sometimes a cheerful face positively grates on my nerves, and makes me sadder than before. Then, again, I've seen sad faces that did me a world of good—that made me feel as though I had met a fellow-being of flesh and blood like myself, who could sympathize with me, and not one of flint or steel."

"Did I ever strike you as being of flint or steel?" he asked.

Again the color mounted her cheeks.

"You have struck me as being a good many things that you ought not to be. But don't you ever feel discouraged when you have suffered defeat? Did you ever sit down, with your heart in your throat, and wonder if life is worth living?"

"Yes, on at least three occasions that I can call to mind."

She looked at him with a smile that shaded off into tenderness.

"I supposed that you were miles above such a weakness. But I am glad you are not. Somehow, I feel nearer you now. It seems to me that a man who never feels discouraged must lack sensibility."

"Then you thought that *I* lacked sensibility?"

"No, not that," she protested.

"My room-mate at college was a powerful fellow,

The Pride of Tellfair

physically and intellectually," said Davenport. "I always think of him when courage is mentioned. Once a negro set the town and university in a fury by one of the unspeakable crimes of his race. Hawkins joined the posse, and tracked the wretch to a cave. The officers balked, and Hawkins, with a knife in his teeth, crawled into that death-trap on his hands and knees, knowing that that desperate black fiend crouched at the other end like a beast in its lair. Charlie brought him out, too, after half killing him. Not only that, he landed him safely in jail, which required moral as well as physical courage, for the posse was determined to lynch the brute then and there. Yet Hawkins was subject to fits of the profoundest despondency, and I've seen him throw himself on the bed and lie there for hours, too dejected to speak or even answer a question."

"What would you do for him?" she asked, pityingly.

"Sit and smoke."

"Oh, you *are* flint."

"There was nothing else to do. Two girls would have handled it differently, I know, but we couldn't. Finally he would get up and tackle his books again, and that was the last of it."

"What was his trouble?"

"Nothing except the vast future. It was vaster then to both of us than it is now."

"You are so old!" said she, with tender irony. "Is he taking care of it properly now—the future?"

"He's making money, if that is what you mean. He's a mining lawyer in Colorado, with an income of ten thousand a year, and unparalleled chances to invest it."

"Is he married?"

"No. Women are scarce out that way, he writes," he added, laughing.

She did not smile, but gazed musingly into the fire. Silence fell. It was not because there was nothing to

The Pride of Tellfair

say; rather because there was too much. Both realized that the evening was to be momentous for them. Bertha's marriage had radically changed their relations to each other, and now was the time, if ever, for a readjustment. A readjustment could mean but one thing to Davenport, and he supposed it could mean but one to her. Yet he was not sure.

The firelight in front and the shadows behind gave her beauty a strange and fascinating setting. As she leaned forward with her chin in her hand, her full throat and square brow were revealed to him as he had never seen them before. Her lips, also, were pursed a little, which gave them a firmer but at the same time a more lovable, kissable look.

She started finally, as if remembering that she was not alone, and glanced at her companion with a faint flush, visible even in the red glow.

"A penny for your thoughts," said he.

"Not for a million," she answered, quickly, as if snatching them out of his reach, and laughed.

"I can guess."

"You needn't try."

"Just once."

"If you do, I shall look straight into the fire and not turn my head or say yes or no."

"Then it wouldn't be any fun. Shall I tell you, then, what I was thinking of?"

She looked doubtful. She fancied she already knew. He saw her hand tighten around the arm of the chair. It might have been around his heart, from the feeling there.

"I was thinking of you," said he, simply.

She flashed him a little, ambiguous glance, half comical, half shy, and said nothing.

"I was thinking of both you and Bertha Congreve. You have heard of her marriage, of course."

The Pride of Tellfair

She nodded.

"Perhaps you have also heard that I was one of the witnesses."

She nodded again.

He briefly sketched the events of that night.

"I did not try to stop them. I could not, and I should not if I could. I saw Harvey the next day. He was considerably cut up, but attached no blame to me. What hurt him most was that Bertha should do the thing clandestinely, as if he were a tyrant who could not be reasoned with. Volley did blame me, and followed me to the door to tell me, out of Harvey's hearing, that she thought I had personal reasons for getting Bertha married off."

He paused, and Josephine looked up with gleaming eyes, waiting.

"I told her that she was not wholly wrong," he added.

"Oh, Morris!" she exclaimed, doubtfully.

"I explained that it was her own daughter, not I, who had made the marriage desirable to me. Was I right? Had I reason to be glad of Bertha's marriage?"

She did not answer, perhaps because he had not made it easy enough for her yet. The question was too indirect, drew too heavily upon her modesty, and took for granted that which maidens love to close their eyes to and affect not to see.

He drew his chair closer to hers. When he leaned upon the arm of it, she feigned ignorance of the fact. When he took her hand, she let him keep it.

"Is it all right?" he asked, softly. Her head drooped and he could look down into the black coils of her hair.

She nodded, ever so little, but it was a nod.

"You have thought it all out, and decided that it is right?"

Again the almost invisible nod. He smiled tenderly, and smoothed her hair for a moment. Perhaps he

The Pride of Tellfair

gently inclined her, perhaps she unconsciously leaned. Anyhow, her head came slowly nearer, until at last, with a little, convulsive movement, it lay on his breast.

It was all very simple, very natural, and yet very momentous. When he bent his own head lower, and tilted hers a little nearer, and kissed her, she shut her eyes in that maidenly shame which is joy. When he dared her to open her eyes, she shook her head and showed him her pearly teeth instead, in a smile, and he kissed them. When at last she did open her eyes, they shone upon him with the pure light of twin stars, and a mist suddenly came into his own.

At that moment he supposed he loved her as much as it was possible for one human being to love another. Yet the time came when he realized that what he felt in that exquisite moment was but the bursting of love from its seed. The tiny, tender, pale-green sprout had yet to become the lusty stalk, with roots, leaves, and branches; and, like a century-plant, the splendid bloom which was to crown it was to be years in the making.

"Do you think they are going to be happy, Morris?" she asked, finally. He knew that *they* meant the Col-lies.

"According to all the formulas for marital happiness that ever I heard of, they won't. Yet I have an idea that they will fool us all. What Collie goes after he usually gets; and if he once grasps the idea that happiness is essential to a strictly first-class, up-to-date marriage—"

"Oh, sweetheart!" she exclaimed, with such sweet reproach that he was impelled to kiss her again. "Just as if any man would have to *grasp* that idea! Is that the way the men do when they get married—*make* themselves happy, just as they would make themselves warm?"

"Doesn't a woman, too?"

The Pride of Tellfair

"Never! She just accepts happiness, if it comes. If it doesn't, she accepts the other thing. Are you going to try to make yourself happy when we—when you—when it comes your turn?"

"No, I sha'n't dabble with the vintage that goes into our cup. Generally speaking, I think a man ought to, instead of stupidly drinking whatever is held to his lips." She knew he was in play. "But in our case I don't think it's necessary."

"Do you mean that you are going to leave it all to me?"

"No, I think we can both safely leave it to higher hands than ours."

She snuggled a little closer, and he knew she was glad of his saying that. He felt her fingers tiptoeing around his upper vest-pocket, close to his heart, and they burned like electrodes. They paused on his pencils, and he thought she might take them out, in play. But he was yet too new to her; it was too personal an act, and her courage evidently failed her. Some time, he reflected, it would not fail her, and he began to realize from that moment that a woman's perfect love is not a golden apple to be plucked and thrust into one's pocket, but rather a mountain pinnacle to be gained only by slow, laborious, yet surpassingly sweet, climbing.

"There is one thing I must tell you," said she, nervously picking at one of his buttons. "Jean has always lived with us. He used to carry me out for the air before I was six months old. He has always been like one of the family. He couldn't possibly make his own living now, and I—I should like you to take him along with my other encumbrances."

He smiled tenderly.

"Oh, I couldn't let Campeau go, under any circumstances. I list him among your assets, not your encumbrances. He's the only specimen in Tellfair—or in

The Pride of Tellfair

the State, so far as I know—of a genuine imported old French family retainer."

"Only, the dear old fellow is rather worn," said she, laughing happily. "But he has been father, mother, and all to Victoria and me, since the others went. I don't know but you ought to ask him for my hand, Morris," she added, with tender mischief. "He's the only one now to give me away. And maybe he wouldn't let you have me. He's afraid of lawyers."

"If he wouldn't, I should come like the wicked genie in the *Arabian Nights*, and steal the beautiful princess away. Then I should carry her to my castle. In what part of town should you like that castle to be?"

"Oh, as your captive I shouldn't have any choice."

"Then I should use this very house."

She colored with pleasure.

"I feared you might think it too old-fashioned, and would want to rent it out. I couldn't let you sell it."

"Let *me* sell it!" he said.

"Why, yes. It will be yours, won't it—then?"

"No."

"Doesn't the law give it to you when I—when you—when we marry?"

"Not that I have heard of."

"I supposed it did. I want it to."

"That's another matter. *You* can give it to me."

"Then I do."

"Very well, I accept it. We'll make some changes, if you say so. We'll put a furnace in the basement, a new fountain in the yard, and horses in the stable." He paused, with his eyes upon her ringless fingers. "I once did you a great injustice, my dear. You remember—when I insinuated that you had got your interest money from Mr. Chouinard? I regretted it deeply at the time, but it was not until later that I learned how cruel I had unwittingly been."

The Pride of Tellfair

"What do you mean?" she asked, uneasily.

"When I found where these had gone," he answered, laying his hand upon her fingers with the air of blessing them.

She shrank a little from his touch, and he could see the hot blood rising in her face.

"I hoped you would never know that," said she, almost inaudibly. "I hoped no one would ever know it. How did you find it out?"

He told her. She listened with a changeless face until he mentioned Volley Congreve's name; then she caught her breath and clapped her hands to her face.

"Then everybody knows it!" she cried.

"No," said he, confidently. "Nobody but Volley and me. I think I can promise you that no one else will ever know it. I put a knot in Volley's tongue, on that subject, that she won't untie. But I have uncovered this painful subject, my dear, to tell you that we are going to have that jewelry all back—every piece of it—and I have told you now because the sooner we get it the better. I am going into Chicago again to-morrow or the next day, and I think you had better let me take that pawn-ticket along."

Her eyes glowed for a moment over the thought of getting the precious keepsakes back. Then her face fell.

"I *can't*, Morris," said she, in distress. "Not now. Not till we are married."

"But I am merely going to lend you the money, all in due form, properly secured—I take no chances with my gold—and will redeem the jewels merely as your agent, for which I shall charge you the regular fee."

What could a girl do with such a man?

"Oh, dear, you are a wizard—a naughty wizard!" she exclaimed, with a little whimper of pleasure. "Victoria will be so happy."

The Pride of Tellfair

"Anybody else?"

"Yes, Jean."

"Anybody else?"

"You!"

"Very well. Then Victoria, Jean, and I will celebrate the occasion, all by ourselves."

"And *I*!" she cried, conquered, and glad to be.

He arose to go. She was standing between him and the fire—a little flushed, a little tousled.

"I'm sorry I didn't light the lamp—now," said she. Such sweet roguery played in her eyes that he returned and once more pressed her to his bosom.

"You mustn't," said she. "You must go home. Don't you remember how you used to make fun of Miss Catlin's sweetheart for tarrying so long on her porch, in the shade of the vines? And you ought to do better than he, for he is two or three years younger than you."

"No fool like an old fool."

"You aren't old; you are just *older*."

"How can a man be older without being old? Old, older, oldest."

"Now, dear, you *are* foolish."

THE END

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